

June 21, 2020 3rd Sunday after Pentecost
Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

Jeremiah 20:7-13, Romans 6:1b-11
Matthew 10:24-39

Star Tribune article in the print version on 6-15-20, link here: <https://www.startribune.com/minneapolis-gathering-focuses-on-a-future-with-a-new-type-of-police-department/571253752/>. Debie Thomas in blog Journey with Jesus, posted on 6-14-20 entitled What to Fear, link here: <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/lectionary-essays/current-essay?id=2668>

Grace to you, beloved of Christ Jesus. Amen.

Let me say it plain: these are tough passages.

These aren't the ones that Hallmark plucks out to adorn cards, not on Father's Day,
probably not on any day.

Family member against family member.

Friend against friend.

These are harsh texts.

Or maybe I should rephrase that: these are truth-telling texts. Truth telling.

In an article this week in the Star Tribune,

Brian Fullman, an organizer with ISAIAH, engaged a crowd at North Commons Park.

He wondered out loud how we'd gotten to this point.

How the police killing of a black man could spark "global outrage and, finally, a sense that change is possible."

"This is not just about one death," Brian Fullman called out, describing the systemic "arrogance, complacency, and disrespect" in the Minneapolis Police Department, recounting the history.

Then Brian Fullman posed the question to the crowd: "How did we get here, people?"

...How did we get here?

And a man shouted from way in the back... "By being quiet!"

Um hm. By being quiet.

The weight these days is heavy for many.

It's especially heavy for our kin who are black, or indigenous, or people of color.

This heavy-ness has been on my mind and heart all week.

It's been the thread running through conversation after conversation with friends and church members and family.

While the days of protests and marches and the national guard have lightened for some,
that is privilege speaking.

It's privilege that would dare us to ignore this crisis, to return to any sense of normal,

while we dwell on this cusp, this moment.

On Friday morning as I stood in the alley at the garbage bin,

a neighbor of mine came out with her bag of trash.

She's an African American woman, probably about my age.

We know each other just enough to say hello, or wave coming and going.

She asked how I was, and I asked how she was.

"I'm tired," was her response, "I'm tired."

Her words caught me, for so often that "how are you" question is proforma:

it's as standard as any greeting.

But when I asked, she didn't just say she was fine.

No, she said, "I'm tried." She told the truth, or at least part of the truth.

I don't know if she was just coming off a shift at work, or a poor night's sleep,

or trying to juggle caring for her family.

I don't know if her tired-ness is the exhaustion of the week, or the existential exhaustion of 500 year.

Maybe both.

"I'm tired," she said. My neighbor told the truth. "I'm tired."

Our gospel this morning from Matthew is a compilation of sayings from Jesus.

Warnings, really: warnings of the opposition they will face, and then a refrain: don't be afraid.

Debie Thomas writes, "Jesus will name realities we don't want named.

He will upset hierarchies we'd rather keep intact.

He will expose the lies we tell ourselves out of cowardice, laziness, or obstinacy."

She continues, "And [Jesus] will disrupt all [the] dynamics in our relationships with ourselves and with each other that keep us from wholeness and holiness.

This is not because Jesus wants us to suffer.

It's because " she says, "he knows that real peace is worth fighting for."

We can hear Jesus words today, his hard words, his words of suffering, in two very different tones.

Often we... Or I'll just speak for myself: often I hear the words of today's gospel as prescriptive.

Jesus prescribing these hard things.

Jesus prescribing that these things must happen, so go out there, grab your cross.

The other way to hear these words is descriptive—perhaps this is newer, I find it very helpful.

The descriptive tone is where Jesus describes the potential reality of following in his way, he tells the truth.

He's saying, "Hey folks, just a heads up If you do all these things I'm calling you to do
(welcome and heal and love and forgive and upend)

Thanksgiving dinner, the family reunion, the 4th of July picnic, they may never be comfortable again.
You need to know this."

Jesus is describing what is happening (and what may well happen) if we follow his way.
He's telling the truth.

Today we also heard from the prophet Jeremiah.

A little background is helpful here:

This is one of Jeremiah's confessions.

They are really more like poems, or psalms of lament.

Facing captivity, Jeremiah cries out to God.

He is laying bare what he's facing, accusing God of enticing him into this hard spot
where he must do and say incredibly difficult and painful things.

When it gets rough he tries his best to sidestep the truth, to back out of the task, to ignore his calling,
only to feel the "burning fire shut up in his bones."

"I'm weary from holding it in," he says, and so the prophet speaks.

Reading Jeremiah this week, took me back to the Churchwide Assemblies of much of the 2000s.

I was a voting member at a few of them: a young-ish queer person in the church, part of a movement for
change, a movement to open the doors of the ELCA to LGBTQ leaders.

I remember in my bones the burning, in my gut, the knowing I must stand to speak, the nerves, the fear, the
coming out again and again and again.

The truth is: That truth telling changed me, forever.

At its best, it piqued my empathy for people facing oppression.

Because I know what my oppression feels like, I can hear it from others.

It empowered my voice to speak at the intersections.

It made me weary.

Really, it set a muscle memory within me: when I get this feeling in my gut, I can't sit by.

I can't ignore the tears, or my sibling's truth.

I must use my power—whatever that is—to be part of the change.

So, dear ones, dear church, I want you to get in touch with your gut, with your truth.

I told you about my gut and how it felt at those big church meetings, how it guided me.

What I learned in that space about myself and God's call, I now use in so many spaces in my life.

And it's not about what your gut prompted you to say back when you were 20,

we grow, God changes us, God calls us.

I can use my gut to push me across the threshold, into the places where I'm needed.

You can do that, too.

Get in touch with your gut, let it lead you to where you are need to go.

It's about knowing what your gut feels like, and listening to it.

That's often how God works. That's what the Holy Spirit does.

So, think about a time when you needed to speak the truth?

Maybe you were young, maybe not.

Maybe this was in your family of origin, or maybe in your professionally life, or in a class, or a community. .

What did it feel like in your body, in your soul?

What did you learn in that process?

"What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light."

Get in touch with your gut.

Here's the thing,

It's mighty easy to opt for quiet,

to bite our tongue, to play it safe,

to tell our truths to only to those who share our view—and that's a start.

It can seem good to protect the peace, to avoid division.

But our power is based in relationship.

So the spaces where it's most scary to tell the truth,

are also often the spaces where our truth is most needed.

And since it's relationship that grounds all this, we speak but we also listen.

Listen well, let someone else's truth move us, change us

It's easy when it doesn't feel like your problem, or your child, or your kin.

It's easy when it's not your church family, or your neighbor, or your city.

But dear church, it is: **It is us.**

In the civil right movement of this time,

in the ongoing response to COVID and so much uncertainty,

in the Supreme Court decisions to continue DACA and

to add safeguards for LGBTQ employees, **IT IS US.**

This call of Jesus is risky, incredibly risky.

It's sacrificial, it's exhausting.

Sheesh, telling the truth will change you, and it will change the world.

I know these are rough passages,

maybe not what we want to hear on a day when family may talk or gather for Father's Day.

As much as they are tough, I pray they are also liberative, freeing.

I find truth telling is often that way: scary and tough at first, freeing and liberating in the end

May God bless your fear and uncertainty, with courage.

May God bless your weariness, with rest, with grace, and companions in the journey.

May God bless your truth telling, with the love of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.