

How Will We Grow in the In-Between?

I thank God (that is, divine love – both transcendent beyond our understanding and intimately at work in our lives) that we are together on our live stream and in this house of worship on land loved by First Nations and others before us, loved by us now and into the future.

I thank God that we are together in this moment in our nation's history - a deeply frightening, gut-wrenchingly distressing, heavily shame-laden moment.

And I thank God that we are together to bear witness to the challenges and joys we bravely share with one another from the fabric of our own daily lives.

On this Transfiguration Sunday, let us consider the question: How will we grow in the in-between – the sometimes **frightening, distressing, shame-laden** in-between times? I hope that we can draw on the ethics of our Christian faith to see more clearly the atrocities being committed on our behalf and grapple with how to faithfully resist complicity.

I invite you to join your hearts with mine in a moment of prayer. God of all, we bear witness to your grief in the cries of so many humans in these days we are living. We give thanks for the gift of being freely gathered to worship you, recognizing the layers of privilege that make our comfortable freedom possible. Please help us today to really own how any of our silent inaction in the face of injustice is our complicity in violence. Pull us up onto the mountain with our ancestors in faith. Help us recognize where a cloud is enveloping us in this moment in our shared public life and maybe another cloud enveloping us in our personal life. Help us to step on out of the cloud and into the very real circumstances of our human community. We pray as followers of Jesus. Let the people say together: Amen. Amen.

Fellow sojourners, our country is squarely in the midst of an anti-Micah 6:8 moment. Instead of **doing justice**, our elected officials are cutting and squeezing Medicare, Medicaid and veterans benefits (all of which create justice – equitable access to dignity by supporting the most vulnerable among us) in order to put more money in the pockets of billionaires. My son Sam relies on Medicaid to sustain his physical health. And I imagine there are not many degrees of separation between each of you and someone you love who relies on Medicare, Medicaid or Veterans benefits. Gluttony is currently trumping justice.

Instead of **loving mercy**, our elected officials have cut 60 billion dollars in funding for our US Agency for International Development, ending 10,000 contracts last week and terminating projects providing life-saving resources in 20 nations. Selfish stinginess is how we are currently trumping mercy.

Instead of **doing justice and loving mercy**, our elected officials are forming an alliance with a dictator, condoning a ruthless war against the people of Ukraine, and threatening to withdraw our financial support for Ukraine – who has been defending itself for three years, having sustained more than 40,000 deaths and 20,000 injuries due to an unprovoked invasion. We know that women and children are disproportionately the victims of this war. False security by way of oppression is how we are currently trumping justice and mercy.

Instead of **walking humbly**, our elected officials are attempting heinous actions like ethnocentrically attempting to erase the name of the Gulf of Mexico, ignorantly stating that neighboring countries are populated by people engaged in criminal activity, and perversely designing a resort that our country would establish once occupying the already Israeli occupied sacred Palestinian territory of Gaza.

Ethnocentrism, ignorance, and perversion are how we are currently trumping humility.

We live in a time in which those holding the highest offices in this land are seeking to **control by force** as opposed to **leading with power**.

How, in the face of all of this, shall we do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly? Resistance. We must each do our part to actively resist – to counteract gluttony, selfish stinginess, false security through oppression, ethnocentrism, ignorance, and perversion.

Let's enter into our gospel story for today for lessons about how to orient ourselves toward sacred, loving resistance. Here is the portion of the reading that most resonated with me:

*“Now Peter and his companions were **weighed down with sleep**, but as they awoke they saw [Jesus'] glory and [Moses and Elijah] who stood with him. Just as they were leaving [Jesus], Peter said to Jesus, ‘Master, it is good for us to be here; let us set up three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah,’ **not realizing what he was saying**. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and **they were terrified as they entered the cloud**.”*

So tired from the climb up the mountain, the disciples were exhausted (they could not keep their eyes open or move one more step), then disoriented by a vision of their teacher glowing and ancestors in faith appearing alongside him, then terrified as they felt enveloped by cloudy surroundings and temporarily stuck where they were.

I wonder: do you feel any of those ways – either during this moment in our nation or in the midst of some situation playing out in your personal life?

Are you weighed down with exhaustion? Are you disoriented by circumstances of which you can't make sense? Are you terrified about what you know is happening just outside the immediate range of your vision or that you think is outside your sphere of influence?

Earlier, I mentioned that disorienting moments (including the individual and collective moments we are currently living in) might be eliciting these responses in us – fear or anxiety, distress or outrage, shame or disgrace. I invite you to gently touch the spaces on your body from which those responses come.

Touching our temples, perhaps rubbing them gently, let's recognize and thank our brain for knowing to feel fear and anxiety. And please repeat with me: Loving God, thank you that my brain knows to feel fear and anxiety. **Loving God, thank you that my brain knows to feel fear and anxiety.**

Touching our bellies, let's recognize and thank our gut intuition for knowing to feel distress and outrage. And please repeat with me: Loving God, thank you that my gut intuition knows to feel distress and outrage. **Loving God, thank you that my gut intuition knows to feel distress and outrage.**

Touching our heart or our neck, let's pause until we feel our heartbeat [*pause*] and then thank our emotional center for knowing to feel shame and disgrace. And please repeat with me: Loving God, thank you that my heart knows to feel shame and disgrace. **Loving God, thank you that my heart knows to feel shame and disgrace.**

All of these natural responses are uncomfortable – fear and anxiety, distress and outrage, shame and disgrace. When Jesus calls us over and over to follow him, he does not call us to comfort.

He calls us to climb mountains and to linger in disorienting clouds – long enough to discern our next best movements forward in the way of (wait for it) not gluttony, selfish stinginess, false security, ethnocentrism, ignorance, and perversion – but the way forward that is radically vulnerable and fiercely faithful love and justice. Jesus calls us into sacred discomfort.

And the good news is that neither Jesus nor the love of God leaves us in a disorienting cloud. They both move alongside us as we emerge from the cloud – more aware of our fear, outrage, and disgrace – ready to grow more resilient and ready to resist evil.

So let's move on our of our disorienting clouds and down into valleys of discovery. In the valleys, we find ways to move forward. Today in the valley of Holy Communion, we will remember how much we need one another.

Today in the valley of our Adult Faith Conversations, we will work together to understand our own racism and how to transform or own minds and potentially our society.

Across the valley of the season of Lent, we will hear from five members of our congregation on Wednesday evenings. We will hear stories of resilience. We will hear these valleys: the loss of a parent early in life, personal fasting rooted in Native heritage, a journey toward sobriety, parenting a child with mental illness, and forming a multiracial family through adoption.

And this spring, in the valley space of our strategic planning process, we will do the hard work of transforming our values into our plan for action.

I invite you to close your eyes at this time if you are comfortable doing so and to receive pieces of John O'Donohue's blessing, spoken to you:

"No place looks like itself, loss of outline makes everything look strangely in-between, unsure of what has been, or what might come.

You are in this time of the interim where everything seems withheld

The path you took to get here has washed out; the way forward is still concealed from you.

Do not allow confusion to squander this call which is loosening your roots in false ground, that you might come free from all you have outgrown.

What is being transfigured here is your mind, and it is difficult and slow to become new. The more faithfully you can endure here, the more refined your heart will become."

May we lean into God's powerful love during each of our disorienting in-between times, with our eyes set on doing justice, loving mercy and walking humbly. Love is counting on us. Amen.

Rev. Clare Gromoll
St. Croix United Church (Bayport, MN)
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Luke 9:28-36, "For the Interim Time"