

Kate's message, entitled "Tears" from September 22nd, suggests that it is time for the church universal to revive an ancient practice of lament to help us reconnect with our senses and free us for healing action in the world. Based on Jeremiah 8:18-9:1; Luke 16:1-13.

I know here are people here today waiting to see if I would dare use this gospel as one of my readings this morning. They attended House Church on Wednesday and found the parable rather disturbing. Is Jesus supporting dishonesty, as someone is playing loose and fast with someone's money? This didn't sound like the Jesus they know. Marina came to the rescue – "This is simply a mistranslation" – noting the many mistranslations in the history of the Bible. Then "or maybe Jesus was just being sarcastic." I loved her passionate defense of Jesus, but was not quite satisfied.

We talked about shrewdness vs. honesty, and if it was necessary to be shrewd to survive in Jesus' time. Then we heard Joel coming in late and were eager to get his expertise. As usual, he brought it – the idea that money can be seen as a dishonest currency in the world in which the true currency is **love**. While I liked that a lot, it didn't really answer the question of dishonest people.

One thing I could add was the nature of parable. These stories are not just little entertaining tales. They have a purpose – to **shock people** out of an ordinary way of thinking. And while we were shocked by Jesus' advice to "make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth" and admitting that the people of this age are "more shrewd dealing with their own generation than are children of light," we couldn't make sense of what we were supposed to be shocked into! Somehow we didn't think we should loosen our moral code. Not in these times!

The most satisfying explanation of the parable brought to my attention was by a hip hop artist, J. Kwest, otherwise known as Julian DeShazier, a senior minister at the University Church in Chicago. It was in an article in the latest *Christian Century*. A performer himself, he reminds us of the "**room**" that Jesus was

playing as he told the parable. Surrounding him are his disciples, but within earshot are those who Luke refers to as the "tax collectors and sinners," the children of this age for whom money was often the primary currency.

Jesus said: "Make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth." J. Kwest interprets: "In other words: *If you've been dishonest thus far, use what you've gained for some good.* He's not telling disciples to be dishonest, this is a sermon for the dishonest already among them... Jesus offers a code of care and concern for those who have actively exploited people... as believers, can we offer that same compassion?" In our world we tend to see black and white, good and bad, people to be loved and people to be rejected. But is our calling to embrace the good and shun others, or work for the redemption of all, where all can feel worthy of love and respect? Perhaps people who have been good at exploitation, can find their way to being shrewd in more honest ways to benefit humankind. Our problems are just too big to be left for a select moral elite.

Today, we are often too quick to condemn and dismiss the "sinners". Often terrible acts are committed in a quest for survival, for the protection of family and children, sometimes out of desperation, and yes, just plain greed. Our prisons are full of people who had little opportunity to remain ethically pure. Until we hear their stories and level the playing field, compassion is the only appropriate response to those who have never known love as currency. We are a "throw out" and "lock up" culture. We make judgements about who is and who is not worthy of saving. In this parable, perhaps Jesus sees someone who is worth more and can do more than rot in prison.

Here I see a connection between Luke and Jeremiah. But first, as we read the verses, it is hard to determine who the speaker is. Is it

God? Is it Jeremiah? Does it go back and forth? Since it is the prophet's calling to speak the heart of God to the people, whether it is in anger or in love, I am going to assume that God's sentiments are throughout. **God** is the one whose heart is sick, hurt by the hurt of the poor people, who have brought calamity upon themselves. They have gone after idols. They have not honored the covenant. They expect God's protection, but do nothing to assure it. Later in the chapter, Jeremiah expresses "They have grown strong in the land for falsehood and not for truth." Like the manager in the parable, the people are primarily interested in taking care of themselves rather than being faithful. But like Jesus in the Gospel, God is not so willing to give up on them.

But, **what is there to do?** Hear these words again: "For the hurt of my poor people, I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me...O that my head were a spring of water, and my eyes a fountain of tears, so that I might weep day and night..." God wills to shed a fountain of tears. But, what good is that, we may ask? Don't we know, what's done is done, and it makes no sense to cry over spilt milk? Well, it may not make sense. **But it is wise.**

Our culture has something to learn from ancient Israel. There is a time on earth, a season, for everything. The words in Jeremiah are words of **lament**. They are not cold, unfeeling words, the kind we often hear in a throw away, lock up culture. They are warm words, full of tears, heartfelt and grieving. They are the kind of words, the kind of feelings, that don't allow our souls to atrophy under great distress. "For the hurt of my people, I am hurt. I mourn and dismay has taken hold of me." Tears are a necessary balm for the pain of our culture and our lives. Without them, the soul grows dry. All that can grow there is fragile, easily broken, and prone to anger.

When I see stories of the children separated from their parents at the border, my heart is broken, but more for the one who sits quiet with a vacant stare than the one who cries and cries, and cannot be consoled. Tears tell us we can still

access our deepest selves, the place where God cries within us, and is with us in our pain. Tears keep us from paralysis. What is called for in our war-torn, climate-threatened, violence-ridden world are the tears that keep us connected to our senses, keep us moving,

Tears tell us
we can still access
our deepest selves,
the place where
God cries within us,
and is with us
in our pain.
Tears keep us from
paralysis.

demanding something new. We need to feel our feelings and then act with all of their passion. It is so right that this climate change movement is being **led by children**. They have not yet lost access to their feelings. They are passionate and can still see right and wrong. And children awaken **our feelings** as nothing else can. They do so at the border and on the protest line. Our hearts must be frozen cold if they, the children, cannot move us to action.

Perhaps one of the most important things the church can do today is revive the practice of **lament**. Speak words of grief to awaken our hearts, move us to tears, and own our losses. We must be brought back to our senses and access God inside, along with our sense of right and wrong, truth and dishonesty. Let us break our paralysis, lose our vacant stares, and, with tears and passion, **love the world into wholeness.**
Amen