

“Loving Ourselves As God’s Beloved”
Pentecost 8, Romans 8:12-25
August 16, 2020; 9:00 am
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

Romans 8:12-25 Contemporary English Version (CEV)

¹²My dear friends, we must not live to satisfy our desires. ¹³If you do, you will die. But you will live, if by the help of God’s Spirit you say “No” to your desires. ¹⁴Only those people who are led by God’s Spirit are his children. ¹⁵God’s Spirit doesn’t make us slaves who are afraid of him. Instead, we become his children and call him our Father.^(a) ¹⁶God’s Spirit makes us sure that we are his children. ¹⁷His Spirit lets us know that together with Christ we will be given what God has promised. We will also share in the glory of Christ, because we have suffered with him.

A Wonderful Future for God’s People

¹⁸I am sure that what we are suffering now cannot compare with the glory that will be shown to us. ¹⁹In fact, all creation is eagerly waiting for God to show who his children are. ²⁰Meanwhile, creation is confused, but not because it wants to be confused. God made it this way in the hope ²¹that creation would be set free from decay and would share in the glorious freedom of his children. ²²We know that

all creation is still groaning and is in pain, like a woman about to give birth.

²³The Spirit makes us sure about what we will be in the future. But now we groan silently, while we wait for God to show that we are his children.^(b) This means that our bodies will also be set free. ²⁴And this hope is what saves us. But if we already have what we hope for, there is no need to keep on hoping. ²⁵However, we hope for something we have not yet seen, and we patiently wait for it.

I. SUSTAINING NOW & INTO WHAT’S NEXT

How’s your soul? How are you doing? In these times when “we hope for something we have not yet seen, and we patiently wait for it.”

Or not so patiently! We have been talking many weeks about loving God and loving our neighbors as ourselves. But, do you notice how much we just gloss over that “as ourselves” part?

We are conditioned to think that’s “not Christian”—that loving ourselves and truly caring for ourselves—body, mind and spirit. We are supposed to serve and love others, right? Until we drop, right?!

And if we do, more than just little old us will drop. For, we will drop balls and plates that we’re juggling; let people down and drag the world down with us.

We are in this for the long haul. This journey called life. And this particular chapter of the journey—the double pandemic—is a special wake-up call to the

need for self-care and tending to our own spirits;
nurturing our own souls.

In order to sustain for the long haul, we must sustain spiritual practices that feed us, recharge our batteries, tend the deepest longings of our hearts.

How do we sustain? We start by remembering who and Whose we are—Children of the Heavenly Father and Mother. Beloved of God. Held by the Holy.

Valarie Kaur—a Sikh activist and founder of the **Revolutionary Love Project**, suggests we re-think this time; reimagine the metaphor—by changing one little letter.

She says:

“What if the darkness of the nation right now is not the darkness of the Tomb, but the darkness of the Womb? What if this is our time of great transition?”

This time we find ourselves in—with two pandemics—COVID-19 and Racism/White Supremacy—can indeed feel like the darkness of the tomb.

And what great power and healing and strength we might find in pondering this metaphor anew, and considering the darkness to be a preparation for a new beginning; a birth if you will.

Imagine what might be different in our perspective if we exchange Tomb Time for Womb Time. Can we reprioritize our emotions *and* our actions. Perhaps we

no longer need to feel depressed and helpless. Instead we can feel anticipation, hope and, yes, even joy.

II. EXAMPLES OF RE-IMAGINING

Consider these messages from around the world—people finding ways to sustain and practice self-care, while reimagining the kind of time we are in.

From a friend:

Life was hard today. My sister, who has Alzheimer’s, dog died. She is locked down in her care facility and doesn’t understand why she can’t have a hug. She is in Denver, I am out of state. I feel like I should fix this but know that I can’t. My son lost a job singing in Austria because Covid was so mishandled that he can’t travel to said job.

Yet, I am white, privileged because of it. I have a safe place to live, food and quite frankly, privilege. Still, selfish as that might be, my life was **very hard today**. I have other family who are never in touch because we stand on two different ends of a political spectrum. In this time of Covid it is all about **loss**. Many and varied kinds of loss. My life was hard today. For me, this is one day or more, not a lifetime. Maybe that is my lesson.

My response to my friend was of gratitude for her sharing so honestly and poignantly. And to remind us both that it’s “not a competition.” Yes, many have struggles that seem far beyond comparison to ours and vice versa. But we all hurt and struggle and need support—always.

PEEL THE POTATOES

Other voices over the centuries and now today, share poignant messages for us, when we need to remember to love ourselves *as well as* love God and neighbor. A modern-day mystic named **Nathan** shares this:

There is a famous Zen teaching that says, "one does not peel the potatoes and practice Zen. Zen is just peeling the darned potatoes." Sometimes, these days, it feels like it's all I can do to just "peel the potatoes."

All around us we see the broken places in our world and, as people of compassion and empathy, we feel this urgent sense of omnidirectional responsibility.

What if I could just stop feeling responsible for saving the world, today?

And, naturally, your pastor's response is always, "Beloveds, please remember that the world already has a savior. And it's not you."

The truth is that, for some of us, the very fact that we can "clam up" in the face of the injustices of the world is, itself, a privilege that many people don't have. But knowing this doesn't make us feel any better.

I had several coaches growing up. A few good ones. One very, very good one. And he told me something I'll never forget. He said, "Nathan, so long as you agree to do your best, to continue showing up at practice, and to allow me to push you—I give you permission to drop the ball as many times as you need to."

Just hearing these words—"You have permission to drop the ball, today," meant so much to me.

Jesus never gave up on His disciples. And boy are they prone to dropping the ball. They appear to make mistakes endlessly. And yet He is with them until the very bitter end—*and then even beyond the end.*

They are given permission to be tired. To lay down their burdens. To stop "**discipling**" for just a moment and meditate upon Him.

I don't know whether or not you need to hear this today—but I know I do—God sees your good efforts and wants you to know that your value as a person has nothing to do with your works.

You were, are, and will forever be the most beautiful thing in God's sight regardless of how many times you drop the ball today.

Regardless of how many potatoes you actually peel. Regardless of absolutely anything that you do or do not do. You weren't *created* to be a human doing.

You are a human being.

And sometimes, sometimes, continuing to simply *be* is the best and most beautiful way you can praise your creator.

Rest, weary ones, and remember that we are a people who celebrate a victory that is already won—even as we turn our eyes back toward the field of the world and press our hands again into the worn, wooden handles of the Gospel plow.

You are deeply and unconditionally loved by God -

Thomas Merton encourages us in this time when it's hard to see the "results of our labors" that in God's realm it's not as much about "results" as we think:

"Do not depend on the hope of **results**. When you (we) are doing the sort of work you have taken on, essentially an apostolic work, you may have to face the fact that your work will be apparently worthless and achieve no result at all, if not results **opposite** to what you expect. As you get used to this idea, you start more and more to concentrate not on the results but on the value, the rightness, the truth of the work itself."

– (Thomas Merton)

Pastor Jane Kramer, at our sister UCC church in Hayden, CO, shared with us her sermon about the difficulties of being a pastor in COVID times. She talked about hitting a wall one day that she just couldn't get past, and needed simply to be held in the loving arms of God and her beloved congregation.

"I am transparent with you because I feel I am doing you an injustice by pretending that everything is OK. If you thought I was strong and dealing with everything with ease, it might diminish the fact that you are struggling within yourself. With all the challenges this world is facing, we are ALL vulnerable to the stresses and respond in our own ways. It is very clear that the world, even more specifically this community, is feeling the heaviness that surrounds us.

A wonderful pastor once told me "you can't take care of others if you don't take care of YOU." No truer words

have ever been spoken. It is more than OK if you need to cry or to talk to someone to get your feelings off your chest. Trust me, it helps. I am here for you anytime you need ears to listen or a shoulder to cry on. Take time for YOU!

This experience has prompted me to commit to better care of myself and I encourage you to do the same. Here are some ideas for you to prayerfully consider in this Womb Time we are in:

1. Spend more intentional time with God. Find a time that works best for you. Open yourself to receiving the Light and the Word from the Holy One.
2. Acknowledge your feelings and respect them. Know that you are entitled to any emotions that may arise for you. Feel the feels!
3. Try writing down your areas that are causing you stress. Share this list with God. Turn it over to the One who can lift those burdens and make them lighter.
4. Take time for YOU! That time may look different to every single person on every single day. You know what makes your heart happy and will bring you a sense of calmness.
5. Take time to talk to someone that you feel will understand you and will take time to listen. Know that I am here if you feel you would like to talk. (Porch visits! Phone, email, sit on the benches outside the church.)

6. Dwell on the positive. It is SO easy to get stuck on the negative and develop a “woe is me” attitude. Our God can break through the darkness and bring our focus back to what is most important: God’s unfailing love for us.
7. Find an activity that you enjoy that will help you focus outside of yourself. Maybe helping others will brighten your day or maybe you need time alone in nature. Whatever it is, take time.

YOU are beloved child of God. YOU are enough. YOU are not alone. Receive the hope Christ brings. ALL things are possible through Christ who strengthens us.

Hear these, our scripture words, with new ears –for this Time:

Romans 8:12-25 The Message

¹⁵⁻¹⁷ This resurrection life you received from God is not a timid, grave-tending life. It’s adventurously expectant, greeting God with a childlike **“What’s next, Papa?”** God’s Spirit touches our spirits and confirms who we really are. We know who he is, and we know who we are: Father and children. And we know we are going to get what’s coming to us—an unbelievable inheritance! We go through exactly what Christ goes through. If we go through the hard times with him, then we’re certainly going to go through the good times with him!

^{s22-25} All around us we observe a **pregnant** creation. The difficult times of pain throughout the world are simply birth

pangs. But it’s not only around us; it’s *within* us. The Spirit of God is arousing us within. We’re also feeling the birth pangs. These sterile and barren bodies of ours are yearning for full deliverance. That is why waiting does not diminish us, any more than waiting diminishes a pregnant mother. We are enlarged in the waiting. We, of course, don’t see what is enlarging us. But the longer we wait, the larger we become, and the more joyful our expectancy.

May our Tomb Time become a profound and joyful Womb Time! A time of transition and transformation for humanity. A new beginning, led by Revolutionary Love—for God, our neighbors AND ourselves. It starts at home—loving ourselves as the sacred child of God that we are.

It starts in the Womb of creation, as we are held and safe and surrounded in loving arms. We wait—sometimes patiently and with perseverance—but other times chomping at the bit—“What’s next, Papa?!” What do you have in store for your children? Led by the Spirit who is not only around us but within us. What’s next, Mother/Father God?! We are ready for new birth, new life and revolutionary love for all!

Amen.