

I have a Godmother named Ruth. She was born to a Lutheran farming family in Saskatchewan, CANADA. Two deep loves took root in her as a child - the Lutheran faith, and the land she called home. She found deep connection in the natural world of rural Saskatchewan and deep connection in faith sitting in the pews of church on Sunday mornings. Over time that faith grew into study and that study led to a true, God-given sense of call to be a pastor, even as the Canadian Church was just beginning its journey toward ordaining women. Eventually, she was ordained a pastor, to the Ministry of Word & Sacrament in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. I don't know the story about when she met my parents but somewhere along the way I was born and they asked her to be my Godmother, for which I'm very grateful.

I was too young to remember or even understand when it happened, but I learned some years later that, while still serving the Church, it came out that she was a Lesbian. I'm fuzzy on the details about what came next but because of this she was removed from the clergy roster. Defrocked is the word, "cast out" is the effect. The national church removed her from the position in the national church office to which she had been called.

I spoke with her about this recently. She gave me permission to share this story with you. I don't know how going through such an experience must have felt - I hope to speak with her more about it in the coming weeks. Regardless of your feelings around LGBTQ+ people or pastors, can you imagine what this must have been like? I can't imagine it was anything short of shattering.

I start here because it's a story of someone dear to me, and because it brings into relief a word that we received today from our reading of Jeremiah. This word sits centrally in my reading of our scriptures for this Sunday. It describes the state of the people hounding Jesus - what it was that he saw in them that moved him to compassion. It's a word that makes Paul's message to the Ephesians more than lovely. And it's a word that deepens our hearing of this most well-known and well-loved psalm in Christian faith and practice. It's a word that describes what we are sometimes left with on the "rocky path of life": deep hurt, unfathomable loss, and trauma that leave us broken, even shattered. That word is "Remnant."

We heard in Jeremiah that the sheep of God's pasture have been destroyed and scattered by their shepherds. Jeremiah is relaying to those responsible for God's sheep that God is none too happy about this. God's accusation and anger is leveled against those charged with their tending to the point of threat: "you have not attended to them," says the Lord, "So I will attend to you for your evil doings... Then," we hear, "I myself will gather the remnant of my flock... I will bring them back to their fold."

What have you experienced in your life that has broken you and scattered the pieces? Was it the loss of a loved one? An unexpected diagnosis? News of some kind for which you were unprepared? Was it a loud shattering - a scattering of your people in the wake of a mistake or decision? Or was it quiet - barely noticeable until you found a sharp mess spread across the floor? Was it sudden? Or is it ongoing - a slow shattering repeated nightly as you listen to news of drought, water shortages, violence, the ravages of Covid, corrupt shepherds doing their best to scatter?

Chances are good that you know the shattering life can bring, the brokenness that life bears us at times. Through these experiences we long to hear God through the mouth of Jeremiah: I will gather the remnant (that which remains) and raise up a good shepherd - “they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing,’ says the Lord.”

We hear in our gospel reading an echo of these intentions of God as Jesus welcomes back the twelve. Jesus “gathered” the apostles around him: He brought these pieces back together, and listened to what remained in the wake of their experience. He had sent them to spread the good news (repentance and forgiveness of sins) and to show the people the look and feel and taste of that Kingdom come near. Jesus had prepared them to heal the sick, cast out demons and seek the lost. He had prepared them too to be rejected.

I wonder if, on their way, the disciples encountered pieces of lives that had come apart. I wonder if the apostles saw the shattering that illness, that demon possession, that injustice can bring. Did they encounter in themselves a lack of wholeness in the face of human suffering, in the face of rejection, that left them feeling remnant? Whether they did or not, Jesus sees that they need rest, they need to recharge their batteries, regain a sense of their wholeness again - they needed to be restored. But despite his intentions for them, the remnant (the broken and weary masses) arrive ahead of them and are never far behind.

Our gospel story is split this week, with two very significant stories left out completely. While we'll get those stories next week as we move into the Gospel of John, we're receiving the "bread" of a Markan Sandwich this week. So what makes dwelling here important?

They are similar vignettes, with crowds amassing around Jesus to learn and to be healed. Taking place in two different locations, these crowds gather for the same reason - they "recognize him." But what does that mean to recognize Jesus? This is an age without newsprint, TV or digital media. Jesus certainly couldn't have been the only person traveling between towns with close followers. What was it that allowed him to be recognized?

Our story describes the way he looks upon these crowds as "with compassion." What does compassion look like to you?

One article I read this week (a very busy week indeed) was about rest. The author points to Jesus' desire here to give rest to the disciples - "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves (free of the crowds, the work, the great need and the frantic pace) and rest a while." Rest, she writes, "real rest, not guilt-ridden 'stolen time' - comes only as a function of trust."

Seeing those crowds with compassion, what Jesus “recognized” - what moved him to that compassion - was their need for rest (for relief from their suffering, from their brokenness; relief from their sickness, their burdens). Sheep without a Shepherd he called them.

And what they “recognized” in Jesus was a place of rest, of relief: A place to put down their broken pieces, remnants and all. A place where they could trust that not one piece would be rejected, where each piece would be honored and gathered up, where wholeness, healing and rest could be found. In Jesus they saw a trustworthy, compassionate savior, bidding them lie down in green pastures, leading them beside still waters, restoring their souls.

Such rest and trust, such a place of restoration, is necessary - especially in the world today. We can only go so long without it. But we find in Jesus compassion, understanding, and this invitation always to lay down the shards of ourselves and find acceptance, welcome, and a restoring peace.

Wednesday evening was an exciting moment in the life of this church. A good number of building committee members found their way to city hall and sat before the Red Lodge Planning Board. The plans for the new church that we submitted weeks ago were projected onto a screen while Susan Hovde and Linda answered the questions of each committee member. The meeting lasted more than an hour but, at the very end, with all the committee members having voted “yes” to approve, one of them said, “You can be excited now.” Red Lodge had granted us permission to build.

So now, with this permission, in light of these stories of Jesus’ compassionate gathering of broken/remnant people who recognize the gift of what he offers, I need to ask, what is it that we are truly seeking to build?

This reading from the Letter to the Ephesians describes the great gathering promised in our reading from Jeremiah: The dividing walls of hostility and indifference can no longer keep the scattered pieces apart. In Christ, the broken pieces of each and the other have been made one. We read, “In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.”

Hearing these words, Messiah, “You can be excited now”, for this work of building is an invitation to make a place where rest can be found for the broken and burdened. That it may be a place that gathers the scattered and remnant, is my prayer. A place where “they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed. Nor shall any be missing.” A place apart, a “Sanctuary,” where the sick and despairing might touch the fringe of his cloak and rest, and be restored to wholeness and oneness in community and in God. Such would be a holy temple indeed.

My Godmother Ruth published a book in 2018 of poems and stories. It is called *Remnants*. I haven't read all of it at this point but what is becoming clear is that her experience of being cast out by the church never came to define her - this book is not about that, not one bit of it.

The sickness and injury of the crowds that drew a compassionate gaze from Jesus never came to define their existence either. Though it's easy to define each other by our jagged edges we might miss the ways our edges meet, even fit and form something new.

Do you hear the good news in that?

Remnants we may be, we who gather around Jesus. But remnants remain more than the shattered pieces left behind.

Remnants we may be but in God what remains of our lives in the wake of its breaking is held tenderly. And with its particular shape in mind, God joins together the unity in Christ for which we long.

Remnants we may be, but what has been scattered does not change the name by which we are claimed: Beloved Children of God.

AMEN

I believe that Jesus looks with compassion even still on all that shatters and scatters the sheep of his fold. I see in our vision of the building plans, a vision of the community God envisions for all people: a place to gather the scattered, the broken, and the remnants. A place where burdens are carried together, where rest can be found, where restoration, healing, wholeness, and growth in the love and unconditional acceptance of God in Christ can be gathered and pieced together. Such a place is a holy temple in the Lord, where we may be built up each and all...

It is a place to gather the scattered, the remnant. A place where they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed. Nor shall any be missing, says the Lord. A central place where the sick and broken might touch the fringe of his cloak and rest, and be restored, and find their wholeness, our oneness in God.

That no one might ever be turned away again.

This is the last Sunday for some time that our gospel story comes from Mark. The next 5 Sundays will be spent in the gospel of John, chapter 6.

This Sunday we skip over two big events in this part of Mark - the first time Jesus feeds thousands and Jesus walking on water. It seems the lectionary wants to make sure we do not skip over the return of the 12, Jesus welcome back, and the crowds of people.

Echo of the woman with the flow of blood: "If I but touch his clothes... / that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak..."

Jesus intended rest, but the crowds... He has compassion  
Teaching and Healing

**They recognized him - what does it mean to recognize Jesus?**

**Could it have been that compassion?**

"I myself will gather the remnant" of the scattered/divided sheep.

"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near

Restoration: you restore my soul...

Prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies...

Years later she wrote a book called "Remnants."