

“The Wedding”
Psalm 147:1-11, 20c
1 Corinthians 9:16-23
Mark 1:29-39

We have gathered this Fifth Sunday after Epiphany to remember the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles as represented by the Magi in Matthew 2:1–12. Jews and Gentiles alike have, are, and will continue to be reached by the good news of the birth of Jesus. And, as followers of Jesus, we can live engaging lives, in words and deeds that offers others the good news of healing and hope all the time, particularly in such a time as this. God is always at work through the crushings and losses, pairing us with God’s purposes. We become enlightened.

William Temple (1881-1944) Archbishop of Canterbury in the 20th century said, “The church exists primarily for the sake of those who are still outside it.”¹ As Christians, we exist for the benefit of others. I know you know that. So do I. But I struggle sometimes, and I bet you do too. The needs are great and right now you’re thinking of someone who needs you to “benefit” them. But you’re weary. Every day we have an opportunity to wed our words and deeds with God’s good news of redemption. Every day we have opportunities to live words and deeds that benefit others. And yes, the needs of others rarely appear at convenient times.

Psychologist Madeline Levine has been counseling teenagers for over 25 years, but recently Levine has begun to see a new breed of unhappy teenagers—smart, successful, and privileged kids who feel utterly lost and empty. For Levine, one client in particular typified this kind of unhappy teenager. Late on a Friday afternoon—the last appointment of her week—Levine saw a 15-year-old girl who

¹Susan Ratcliffe, *Oxford Essential Quotations (4ed.)* (Oxford University Press, Online Version: 2016).

was “bright, personable, highly pressured by her adoring, but frequently preoccupied ... parents.” The girl was also “very angry.” Levine quickly recognized the girl’s “cutter disguise”—a long-sleeve t-shirt pulled halfway over her hand, with an opening torn in the cuff for her thumb. Such t-shirts are used to hide self-mutilating behaviors: cutting with sharp instruments, piercing with safety pins, or burning with matches. When the young girl pulled back her sleeve, Levine was startled to find that the girl had used a razor to carve the following word onto her forearm — “EMPTY.” Levine commented: I tried to imagine how intensely unhappy my young patient must have felt to cut her distress into her flesh The most common thing I hear in my office from the kids is, “I’m fake.” The surface of [their family life] always looks good The lawns are always perfectly manicured, the houses always look beautiful. But when you get to what’s going on beneath these kids’ T-shirts, there’s not much happening inside.²

Do you ever feel “EMPTY?” And if you do, as a Christian, you have hope. How do those who feel “EMPTY” handle it if they do not know Jesus?

The feeling of being “EMPTY” is best addressed by being in relationship with Jesus, the living Word, and reading the Bible, the written Word. Believing God is central to a Christian’s and church community’s overall health. In this regard, T. D. Jakes writes, “No more process. No more delay. You have direct access. ..God’s Word tells the truth about who you are—so believe it.”³ With direct access to God we are told by Jesus and the Bible that we are loved unconditionally, and that grace and forgiveness abound.

Psalm 147:1-11, 20c, 1 Corinthians 9:16-23 and Mark 1:29-39 assert that every aspect of the Christian life is shaped by Jesus’ baptism, obedience, suffering, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension on behalf of every human, including you and me.

Psalm 147:1-11, 20c instructs us that God builds up, heals and raises up God’s people in love. Psalm 147:11 reads “...but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.”

²Found on the preachingtoday.com website. Madeline Levine, *The Price of Privilege* (Harper Perennial, 2008), 3-5.

³T. D. Jakes, *Crushing* (New York City, New York: FaithWords, 2019), 234-235.

1 Corinthians 9:16-23 states that we are to become weak in order to gain the weak for Christ. Paul does not say that we are to become like the weak, but that we are to become weak. 1 Corinthians 9:22 reads, “To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some.”

Mark 1:29-39 calls Christians to be servants of others and inclusive of all. The events in this section of Mark most likely occurred over the course of a twenty-four-hour Sabbath day. Jesus performed an exorcism in the synagogue healed others on the Sabbath day. Jesus also retreated to pray and soon continued healing others and exorcising demons. Jesus conducted his ministry and spirituality publicly in the Synagogue and crowds and privately in homes and secluded places. Yet, Jesus never sought the spotlight or fame. Mark 1:37-39 reads,

When they [Simon and his companions] found him, they said to him, “Everyone is searching for you. He [Jesus] answered, “Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came to do.” And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Jesus cared for others because of his confidence in his Father and the mission of salvation.

We are to care for others too with the same confidence as Jesus. Like Jesus, for better and for worse, we are to love and serve others. Again, T. D. Jakes writes, “...our crushing is not the end. Our losses only lead to enlightening. Death is not the end...that our God works in seasonal cycles, we are left with the outcome that we were never meant to exist in one form”⁴ Embracing the real needs of others, for better and for worse, is at the core of the gospel.

⁴Ibid., 255.

Jesus showed us how to embrace the real needs of others. So did Paul. Sacrificial love is the most effective witness of the good news of Jesus. Believe God for better and for worse. Reveal God's love for better and for worse. We are in covenant relationship with God and others for better and for worse. Amen.

*This sermon was preached (Livestream due to the Coronavirus) on Sunday, 7 February 2021
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