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Proper 6 of Common Lectionary

Psalm 100

Exodus 19:2-8

Romans 5:1-8

Matthew 9:35-10:8

We will be in Romans for many weeks now. As usual, I encourage you to read the readings during the week so as to be prepared for worship on Sunday.

HELP!

June 21, we are providing beverages and deserts to the Carnival workers over at North Shore Church and we need five who are willing to assist in serving. Beverages and Deserts are to serve 75. Drop off deserts and beverages by 11:00.

Thanks.

Sign up sheet is in fellowship hall.

We are a diverse community that values every individual. We encourage creative, courageous learners and build an enduring foundation for a lifelong spirit of inquiry and joy in learning. We encourage everyone to develop as courageous, creative, collaborative and curious learners.

Our aim is to be hospitable as we celebrate in worship, and fellowship with meals. We are aware that Baptism celebrated with water poured or immersed in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is a Baptism that is accepted by

most mainline Traditional Christian churches. Baptism is a **one-time-only** Sacrament. However, in the instance where a family may have been formed in one of the 'other' Traditions and celebrates Baptism with another [for whatever reason] the baptizing community should inform the parents seeking Baptism that should they, at a later date, go back to that other Tradition there will be need of a celebration of Full Communion prior to, i.e. a celebration of First Communion and/or Confirmation or Marriage in that faith.

It's no secret that we're living in a culture of shoulds.

- they say you *should* exercise every day
- they say you *should* save responsibly for retirement
- they say you *should* wear sunscreen
- they say you *should* eat kale

Also, they say you should live a well-balanced life and be a protective-but-not-overprotective parent and find a vocation that you're passionate about that also provides enough money for your family.

No pressure, right?



A few days ago, I had the pleasure to stand right alongside the lake. I loved listening to the sounds of the tiny waves breaking and the Canadian geese squawking and kids giggling..

I stood at the edge for a long time, letting my thoughts come

and go like waves themselves, then at times, letting them subside entirely. At this moment, I was more interested in listening than thinking. I found myself seeking wisdom for myself and my wider community.

I realized it's a real privilege to be there and added my awareness to that. Then I decided to stand there and really take it in, wondering if I might find insights of some kind. I let my feet sink deeply into the waters edge. Though the sands shifted and changed quite readily, it was a firm kind of stance. I thought about fearfulness – the many fears I tend to carry and the fears we are carrying collectively. These are understandable fears.

But I took that stance because I was seeking something else. From time to time in my life, I've had moments when I felt remarkably empowered and enabled to hold strong, speak prescient truth, or embody steadfastness even in the face of fear and inevitable loss.

"I want more of that," I thought. "For me. For us."

I want wisdom and insight toward less fear found in *Sanctuary*. I want an alive form of fierceness that loves passionately and transforms the particular narratives and the particular violence that we are living.

Not much later, a flat rock washed right up to my feet. It was lined with a lovely shade of purple. I smiled.

Ah, yes, purple. The color often associated with wisdom and spiritual insight. The color often associated with sacred noticing. Then a few minutes later, it happened again. A second flat

rock for skipping washed up next to me.
Yes. I loved it. So then I started looking.
Empowered by the symbols of wisdom at my feet, I started moving my feet down the waters edge, looking for more.

An abundance of symbolic wisdom toward less fear.
This sanctuary on a Lake St. Clair beach certainly didn't transform all of my challenging narratives or all my challenging violence. But for a moment, it changed my relationship to them. And it made me wonder how to keep searching.
I want more of this. For me. For us.

And then, LillyAnn, age three, with painted blue toe nails was there and wanted to go into the water at the New Baltimore beach but was afraid. A step at a time and the taking of another's hand enabled her to go in up to her little knees and then she sat down in the chilly Lake St. Clair to the surprise of her mother. Then, LillyAnn and I began to skip the flat stones that had washed up. Just delightful! A new little friend, The two are new to the New Baltimore area and found the beach most inviting.

Chloe, with purple toe nails, and her Dad then arrived and Chloe, age two, was dragging her daddy into the water and he wasn't dressed for a dunk. By weekend both parents came prepared for a swim. The beech is a blessing for so many.



people scapegoated and

discriminated against by religion, people with sacred names and identities, had more spiritual communities who said their names with respect, support, love, and belonging, rather than marking them labels of disregard and exclusion. We all need communities in our lives that know us, cherish us, and value us. This is a real, human need.`



If I could give one piece of advice to Christian congregations, it might be this - empower the leadership of the **Almost-Dones**.
Who am I talking about?
I'm talking about the people who are on the verge of leaving the congregational community. I don't mean the people who threaten to leave in a manipulative way - "If I don't get my way about such-in-such small detail, I'm leaving this church and taking my pledge dollars with me!" (we know that can harm the community) -- but instead, I mean the people who have given their departure some thought and deliberation.

I'm talking about people who agonize over potentially leaving. . . They don't want to leave the community, but they keep considering it because they long for a different vision, particularly one that connects with local neighbors through justice, shared mission, relationships, and respect. Their thoughts of departure are not a manipulative ploy but a genuine calling. They see an insular congregation and become discouraged, recognizing that their church is concerned almost solely with the needs of its own members, growing its own membership roles, and expanding its own pledges and financial endowments. They begin to consider if they could follow the calling of Jesus more faithfully outside of that insular, institutional structure.

Or they consider leaving because their congregation is causing tangible harm to them or people they love. Often, after first seeking truth, healing, and reconciliation, when things don't shift, they face a painful dilemma. They would prefer to stay in relationship, but facing continued harm, they rightly consider a departure as the only way to preserve their spiritual and emotional health.

Maybe you've heard about *the Dones*? This is a sociological buzzword these days to describe Christians who have left congregations for these very reasons. These types of experiences are happening more regularly.

So I wonder what would happen if the *Almost-Dones* were equipped, not dumped on, to lead and empowered to initiate actual changes? Just because someone retired from teaching doesn't mean they want to do VBS-just because they admire the elderly doesn't mean they know how to go about a sincere visit. Sometimes they need to go along with a seasoned minister as visits are made to get the gist of the how to. Don't talk it, show them.

As you might guess from what I wrote above, I'm not interested to empower leadership of the *Almost-Dones* for insular reasons - so they can stay on the membership rolls and continue to add their pledge dollars. Instead, more vitally, I believe these Christians can lead us toward visions and expressions of Church that are more faithful, connectional, and relationally supportive.

What if they were empowered to lead their congregations out into the neighborhoods with justice, shared mission, relationships, and respect?

What if the people who have experienced harm inside the Church were heard as they name that harm truthfully for what it is? On their own terms and at their own initiative?

That leadership and that truth would transform our communities.

