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Christ Lutheran Church, Ferndale, WA
Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
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Twists and Turns: The Labyrinth Journey of Life and Faith

TWISTS AND TURNS II: THE JOURNEY OF NOT KNOWING WHAT TO DO

This story from II Chronicles is kind of violent – it’s the story of three armies coming to attack Judah, and when King Jehoshaphat heard about it, he was afraid and proclaimed a fast throughout all of Judah. Jehoshaphat then questioned God and finally says this in verse 12: “For we are powerless against this great multitude that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.”

When Jehoshaphat gathered all Judah and Jerusalem together, a prophet, Jahaziel, rose up to say: “Do not fear or be dismayed at this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God’s.... take your position, stand still, and see the victory of the Lord on your behalf. Do not fear or be dismayed....”

As they sang and praised God, the Lord sent an ambush against the three armies so that they attacked each other and destroyed one another. When Jehoshaphat and his people came to take the “booty” from them (yes, “booty” is in the Bible), they found so much they could carry no more – it took three days to get the booty because of its abundance. They called that place “Valley of Beracah” meaning “valley of the blessed.”

It was when King Jehoshaphat admitted that he didn’t know what to do and said, “we do not know what to do but our eyes are on you,” and when the people of Jerusalem and all of Judah stood still and let God fight their battle -- that’s when they received abundance.

So many times in our lives when we do not know what to do we jump into fear like Jehoshaphat did, but instead of standing still and putting our eyes on God, we try to control and manipulate the situation by pushing and pulling and shoving to make things happen. What if the next time you didn’t know what to do, instead of jumping into controlling the situation, you take a cue from King Jehoshaphat and put your eyes on God, stand still, and let God fight your battle for you. Because when you stand still and put your eyes on God, that’s when you will receive “booty” – that’s when you will experience abundance.

Sing verses 1, 3, and 6 of “The King of Love My Shepherd Is”

TWISTS AND TURNS III: THE JOURNEY OF GRIEF

In this passage, Mary was so overcome by both the grief over Jesus’ death as well as the grief of his body being gone from the tomb that she didn’t even at first recognize the resurrected Jesus standing before her.

Grief can overwhelm every single one of us. Francis Weller in *The Wild Edge of Sorrow* says that we grieve for 2 reasons – because we love, and because of the absence of love, and we hold grief in our bodies, even if the reason for our grief happened years and years ago.

Grief is a normal part of life, just like eating. And like we have to metabolize food when we eat, we have to metabolize grief. Weller mentions three ways:

- Stay present with grief
- Develop a living relationship with loss
- Ritualize grief and loss. Ritual = an intentioned body action that has enough time, safety, loving presence for grief to be recognized and released and metabolized

In this passage, Mary metabolized her grief:

- She stayed present with her grief - she went to the tomb early while it was still dark, she stood weeping outside the tomb and even bent over to look in – Peter and the other disciple couldn't stay with their grief – they looked in the tomb, saw the linen wrappings, and returned to their homes.
- Mary named the loss – they have taken him away; she shared her grief with Peter, she answered the angels and “the gardener” (Jesus) when they asked her why she was weeping
- She ritualized her grief - she let her tears flow – she stood weeping outside the tomb, she was willing to take Jesus' body. Mary wasn't scared of her grief.

Grief doesn't completely go away, but we can take cues from Mary to metabolize our grief.

- Stay present with grief – don't be a Peter or a beloved disciple, even though it's our default – fight, flight, or freeze
- Name the loss – counselor, spiritual director, Stephen Minster, to me or Intern Pastor Jory
- Ritualize grief and loss. Ritual = an intentioned body action that has enough time, safety, loving presence (through breath, presence, listening) for grief to be recognized and released and metabolized – LABYRINTH – to help metabolize grief

And to help metabolize your grief, ask yourself these questions: What is my grief? What is my most faithful step in regard to my grief?

And remember that weeping is ok and important, because sometimes our only song is weeping.

TWISTS AND TURNS IV: THE JOURNEY OF JUSTICE

Kids/all – I want you to help me retell this story. Every time you hear the name of the evil king (Pharaoh) – boo (boo) and shout hooray when you hear the names of the midwives Shiphrah and Puah (hooray)

Pharaoh (boo) was the king of Egypt and he was not a nice guy. Pharaoh (boo) was afraid of the Hebrew people living in Egypt, so Pharaoh (boo) made them work really hard building big cities and harvesting crops in the field. One day Pharaoh (boo) realized that even though he was being really mean to the Hebrew people, they kept having babies and multiplying. So Pharaoh (boo) told the midwives Shiphrah and Puah (hooray!), who helped the Hebrew women deliver their babies, to not let any boy babies live so that no boys would grow up to threaten Pharaoh (boo). But Shiphrah and Puah (hooray!) knew and loved God, and they protected the baby girls *and* the baby boys because they knew that God loved both the baby girls and the baby boys and wanted them to live. Shiphrah and Puah (hooray!) even lied to

Pharaoh (**boo**) because they knew that God wanted them to support those who needed help and protection, just like God wants us to do, too. Hooray for Shiphrah and Puah (**hooray!**). (applause)

For you adults:

This story is one of dozens and dozens of stories in the Bible about God's people taking risks to protect those who are the most vulnerable. Because of their love for God, they become the hands and heart of God to ensure justice and protection for those who don't have the power or privilege or protection that they themselves do. The lesson for us is when we are faced with a choice of whether or not to support those who are vulnerable – those adults and children who don't have the power or privilege or protection that we do – as people of faith we always land on the side of justice and protection for those who are most vulnerable. Yes, it may involve risk. Yes, it may feel uncomfortable. Yes, we may even need to defy authority to do so. But when we protect and ensure justice for those who are the most vulnerable, we too will be God's hands and heart in the world.

Let us sing verses 1 and 2 of "we are called" remembering that we are called to act with justice

TWISTS AND TURNS V: THE JOURNEY OF TRUST

There's a note in the Lutheran Study Bible about verses 17 and 18 in this passage that says: "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego do not presume that God will rescue them. They *let God be God*, even if it will cost them their lives." It takes an enormous amount of trust to let God be God no matter what. As the prayer we will pray in a moment says, God has called us to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown, and we do not always know where we are going. As Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego can teach us, even when we don't know how things will turn out, what we can do is trust that God is God and God is in charge, and that we don't need to fear what comes next, because God is already there.

I was reminded when I was at Rainbow Trail Lutheran Camp last week of details about what happened when I was program director one summer. A group of middle schoolers was hiking Eagle Peak, the 13,000-foot mountain behind the camp, when a big storm came up and we radioed to the group to run back down to tree line to avoid the lightning. But one kid named Shane got lost and separated from the group, and even though our staff members searched for him until it was dark, they couldn't find him and had to come down the mountain without him. That night our director called Shane's mom, who arrived at camp late that night and spent all night sitting in a rocking chair on the porch of the main lodge. When our director asked her repeatedly what she needed, she answered repeatedly, "Nothing. God is with my son. He is in God's hands." The next morning when the county search and rescue team found Shane on the mountainside and brought him back to camp, his mom hugged him and made sure he was ok, and then she went directly to the dining hall to help serve breakfast to his rescuers. And Shane even returned to the camp 9 years later to serve as a counselor.

When we journey through the twists and turns of life and faith, may we, too, let God be God, even when we don't know how things will turn out. Like Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and Shane's mom, we can always trust that no matter what we are all in God's hands, that God's hand is always leading us, and God's love is always supporting us. As printed in our bulletin, let us pray...