

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in your sight, Oh Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Please be seated.

Before I start, I want to acknowledge that yesterday was the 80th anniversary of the signing of the executive order establishing the internment camps of Japanese-American citizens in the United States during World War Two. And as I speak today, keep the people who carry the trauma of that experience and the intergenerational trauma of that experience in your thoughts and minds.

Pray for those who abuse you. That looks pretty hard. That seems pretty hard.

And the lesson goes on to say, if you love those who love you what credit is that to you, for even sinners, love those who love them, And I sometimes wonder, how good are we at even that. It came to mind as I was preparing the sermon an article I read a couple of years ago entitled Grief Hides in the Church Bathroom It was about a young woman who had lost her baby an eight month old and she came to church and everyone worship God together as if nothing was wrong.

And partway through the service she left and wept in the church bathroom. The author of the article knew what was going on and went and wept with her. At points, people would come in and not know how to respond. And they didn't pretend that things were all right, hiding their grief or trauma. They wept together. The author is an indigenous American who reflected on the experiences of her people and the trauma they have experienced, a trauma that doesn't get expressed. There is community trauma, the trauma that we feel as parts of the communities we're in - and I suspect many of us remember our experiences during 9-11 or maybe during the shooting at Sandy Hook. There is generational trauma, the trauma that has been inflicted on our ancestors. This has been carried down to us, even in our genes.

We are surrounded by grief and trauma and I mention this as we think about the Lenten groups that will be coming up. Elaine Ramshaw is going to be leading a group on grief and I encourage you people to consider it. I will be leading a group looking at racism through a lens of trauma. And I would encourage you to consider that group as well.

And there are many other great groups that are being offered this Lent. So where is the trauma among us? Where are the people who are hurting. Perhaps some of us have parents or loved ones in their final days. Perhaps there's dementia. Perhaps some of us are living in marriages that are struggling with a spouse who isn't even sure if they want to keep working on this struggle.

Some of us may have siblings with substance use disorder who are struggling to keep their housing. Or maybe someone in our family has lost a child. Maybe one of our children has been abused by someone we trusted and is struggling through PTSD. I suspect that we all experience parts of this trauma and grief - and I come back to this loving our enemies.

It's hard enough to love those among us who are hurting. And so I would like to try something a little bit different. I would encourage you to take a deep breath look around this beautiful church, and think about the things that give you joy and comfort. Feel your body against the church pews and look around at the people in the congregation. Who here is suffering grief or trauma?

Who here is someone that annoys you, that just rubs you the wrong way? Whose style of worship isn't your style of worship? Who thinks the altar should be done a different way than you think it should be done?

Think about this and think about praying for our enemies.

Take a deep breath and think about how much God loves each one of us here - even that person that is grieving, that is traumatized, that rubs off the wrong way. Maybe even, think about our relationship to God. Why are we here in the first place? Are we here to feel a little bit better? Are we here to be seen or to see our friends? What is our relationship with God?

Are we here to love God? Expecting nothing in return?

This leads me to thinking about the confession. We will say in the service in a little bit. "we have not loved you in our whole heart. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves." Pretty heavy topic for today, and I am aware that we're not here to condemn, but to preach Good News. And the Good News is that God loves us, that God loves each one of us more deeply, more fully, more completely than we can even begin to understand and it's from that love that we are empowered to go out and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

So I ask you to do one more brief meditation again, take a deep breath be aware of your presence here in this holy space - the things that comfort you about this church in this community. And I ask you to think how much God loves us.

Jesus loves me this I know for the bible tells me so little ones to him belong, they are weak, but He is strong. Yes, Jesus loves me Yes, Jesus loves me Yes, Jesus loves me The Bible tells me so.
Jesus loves us more deeply than we understand.

Carry this with you as we confess our sins, as we sing about God's presence here with us, and as we experience God in the Communion Service and as we go forth into the world. Amen. Amen.