SERMON TAKE-HOME NOTES — June 1, 2025

Ascension Day Gospel — Luke 24:44-53

[44]Then Jesus said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you — that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." [45]Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, [46]and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, [47]and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. [48]You are witnesses of these things. [49]And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

[50]Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. [51]While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. [52]And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; [53]and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

I switched to Thursday's Ascension Day Gospel Reading because of Bishop Erickson's sermon at the Synod Assembly Friday evening. The theme of this year's Assembly was the third of our synod's Core Values: Compassion. (The other three are Curiosity, Courage, Collaboration) He shared one of the most painful times in his life, and then this poem:

"Steward Your Pain," by Steven Garnaas-Holmes"

You are a steward of all you are and have,
your riches, your gifts, your abilities.
It matters what you do with them.
You are also a steward of your needs, your wounds.
You are a steward of your pain.
What will you do with it?
Many people are poor stewards of their pain:
they feel hurt or fear, and they don't know what to do with it.
They turn it into anger, resentment, blame and violence.
They make others bear their pain.
Others have pain as well—even deeper pain,
the agony of abuse, or generations of oppression—
and they turn it into compassion.
They let it fuel their work for justice and healing.
Your pain is part of your story, part of who you are.
Steward your pain well.
Let Jesus help you carry it, and see where it goes.
Turn your suffering into love. (unfoldinglight.net, 10/21/2024)

Turning pain into compassion for others instead of simply passing the pain onto others. This is our *superpower* as disciples. I believe Jesus is trying to teach us this when he says to his disciples in our Gospel: "that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day." Earlier on the road to Emmaus, he told those disciples that we need to read scriptures in light of the necessity that Messiah had to suffer. Why?

Because I believe learning to turn our pain into compassion instead of passing it onto others *changes the course of human history*. It saves us from ourselves. Think about how the violence throughout history is basically about one group of human beings justifying what is essentially passing their pain onto another group of human beings.

Another mentor, Franciscan priest Richard Rohr, puts it this way:

> As we go through life, the hurts, disappointments, betrayals, abandonments, and the burden of our sinfulness and brokenness pile up, and we do not know what to do with it all. *If we do not transform this pain, we will most assuredly transmit it*, usually to those closest to us: our family, our neighbors, our work partners, and, invariably, the most vulnerable — our children.
>
> Spirituality is about transforming both history and individuals so that we don't just keep handing on the pain to the next generation. . . . (*Just This*, 76-77)

An amendment I would propose to what Rohr says is that we seek to *avoid* passing our pain onto our loved ones by structuring our politics to pass the violence onto *other groups* of people, "Them." We justify it by inventing reasons of why those others aren't good like us, and perhaps even warrant our punishment. Jesus steps in to take the punishment in order to blow apart these schemes, these politics. He suffers our pain on the cross. But he also offers us God's alternative politics which are able to turn the pain into compassion. This is how I've experienced my many years of working to heal racism. People of color have turned their deep pain endured through racism into the fuel to work for justice and peace. This is Good News! This *is* the Gospel today!