

*Ours is Not A God of Tidy Balance Sheets.* September 18, 2022, Jeremiah 8:18-9:1 and Luke 16:1-13

Once again, I come to you in prayer; for our church in this time of transition, for the world, and for each and every one of us. Those who like Jeramiah are lamenting, “Is there no physician here for my wounds?” Those of us like the scheming manager who are too ashamed to beg for help and then find ourselves astonished by God’s blessings. And all of us who wonder if our personal and political divisions are beyond redeeming.

Let us pray.

Holy One, you are beyond our imagining, beyond our control, beyond our comfort. You will not be bound by our schemes. Even as we maintain appearances, and we jockey with our neighbors, even as we make idols from our fears.

But your ways are not our ways. You are not a god of tidy balance sheets or weekly appointments; your love is too deep, your claim too pervasive.

You are there when tempers fray and anger erupts. You are there when anxiety overwhelms, and we withdraw.

You are *here* in every bruised heart, every calloused hand, every tangled dream.

Move among us now. Receive our broken spirits as the offerings we bring this day. Merciful God, breathe deeply into this room your reconciling love, your holy expectation.

Allow us to see the faces of those we have harmed, those we have kept at a distance.  
(silence)

Work in us, Lord, until our hearts are softened, and we dare to seek our neighbor’s good. Teach us to pray with our hands and our feet and our voices.

Teach us to tend the world you love; to sow more than we reap, to heal more than we wound, to make room for others as you make room for us. We pray with hearts both eager and reluctant, trusting that you will meet us – and call to us – just where we are, in the name of Christ. **Amen** [*Prayer above from Feasting on the Word, Worship Companion.*]

This is as good a time as any to remember that prayer and Scripture are not lesson plans or ledgers of good and bad behavior. Even when the stories, like the parable we heard today sound just like that, they are intended to be something else entirely. A small still or booming voice from the One who wants to get our attention so we can imagine a new day.

We come to worship to hear that Great Call in community.

Friends, there is a physician here. There is a balm. There is hope and faith that the Giver of Life is able to renew us so that we, broken and troubled as we may be on some days, and excited and loose as a goose on other days, can open ourselves to renewal.

The Good News of renewal is that the story is not over. Not at Trinity. Not in the world.

Our church and every other community of faith, Christian or not, has the possibility of offering an imagination contrary to the imagination that we are being fed.

Mostly we are being fed hopelessness, suspicion, resentment, and polarization. We used to call it a “dog eat dog world.” Now we call it “It is what it is so get over it.”

The religious imagination that I am talking about is something else entirely. It acknowledges that to live means to suffer (as my 14 year old granddaughter proclaimed recently.) And yet not just to suffer. To really live means that we come alive. In other words, it is more than what it is.

Our God is not a god of tidy balance sheets or weekly appointments. Our God’s claim on us is pervasive and generous. And therein lies the hope that is on the other side of suffering.

Some people call this kind of hope Resurrection Living. Others call it Radical living. Or Reconciling Love. Or Holy Expectation. I call it Courage in the face of change and in the face of the Empire’s determination to convince us that there is no physician here.

As Trinity Church moves forward, and that is exactly what you are doing now, your imagination will be stretched. In fact it already is. Last Sunday Pastor Christine challenged you to stretch how you imagine your many losses including the impending loss of me as your pastor. Today, faithful friends, you are being asked to think more imaginatively about what God is calling you to be and do as a reconciling, resurrecting, radical, open, and affirming community that celebrates a grace that squanders love. Loving without discrimination and without thinking that you need to hold back because times are tight and who knows what is coming next.

Friends, you may not know where to turn right now. But when you remember to turn first to God, you will come ‘round right. You will find yourself giving and given more than you receive and being totally surprised when “the Master” calls you good and faithful servant.

Whether the road you are walking on today and on into the next months, is rocky or smooth, God is steadfast and forgiving. Now is the time to nurture your relationships with each other, your communities, and God. Everything else will fall into place. It may be a place you have not yet imagined. Don’t worry about that. The Balm of Gilead that you know in Christ, heals all, hopes in all, and uses all for the good. Amen.