

Shannon L. Alder, 21st century

"There is no perfection, only beautiful versions of brokenness."

Romans 12:1-8

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God--what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

One of my favorite poems is written by Marge Percy and it is called, "To Be of Use." The line I resonate with the most says, "The pitcher cries for water to carry and a person for work that is real."

I think what is most disorienting, about now the sixth month of living with covid-19, is that it is very hard to know exactly what is real. Our lives have been upended by tiny droplets that none of us can see, the droplets may or may not live on objects, and/or float through the air. If we come into contact with them, some of us will get sick, some will not, some may show symptoms others may not. It is all very illusory. We were not made for this.

We were not made for standing back and waiting, we were made for doing, for jumping into life head first. Percy writes,

"I love people who harness themselves, an ox to a heavy cart,
who pull like water buffalo, with massive patience,
who strain in the mud and the muck to move things forward,
who do what has to be done, again and again."

I want to be with people who submerge
in the task, who go into the fields to harvest
and work in a row and pass the bags along,
who are not parlor generals and field deserters?
but move in a common rhythm
when the food must come in or the fire be put out.

There are indeed fires to be put out, fires both real and metaphoric, but we are scarcely those people who can rush into the fields, line up side by side and do what needs to be done.

Instead we are the people who need to wear masks, who need to stay six feet apart, or not go outdoors at all. Yet, we are mammals born to run in packs. The effects of too much isolation are easily recognizable- remember that movie where Tom Hanks is stranded on a desert island and a soccer ball becomes his best friend? Some alone time is great, but too much can be deadly.

Christians are incarnational people, we believe in a God who for a time dwelt in a human body, and that body drew close to other bodies. Created in God's image we are meant to hug, to hold, to kiss and to cuddle. We were not keeping safe distances; we were made for eating and laughing together, for weeping and grieving together, for praying and singing together- we were made for companionship one another closely just as we are taught Jesus companioned his disciples.

One of the things that attracted me to FCC in the first place is that it is made up of people who are willing to do, I lovingly refer to you as the "the bucket brigade." You are at your best when you are doing something together- we certainly saw that with the Pray Their Names installation- people stepped up and stepped in just at the right moment to create something important, something real and of use. And I think it came as a welcome relief to have a physical reminder that we are still capable of doing good work together. Percy writes;

The work of the world is common as mud.
Botched, it smears the hands, crumbles to dust.
But the thing worth doing well done
has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident."

Sometimes I feel like I am busy all day long, but I haven't a clue what I have accomplished, days run into weeks and it is hard to determine a shape for life that is satisfying let alone, clean or evident.

No, this is not what we were made for- yet, here we are.

What words of comfort might scripture have to offer?

Our focus passage comes from the apostle Paul's words and so you can count on words about sin and purity. Paul's preoccupation was the quandary of how to be in this world but not of it. Paul is a purist- his aim is complete oneness with God. Paul's aspirations were admirable to strive for perfection in all things temporal and spiritual, but I have a hunch that right now, God might be willing to settle for good enough- let's call it a good enough faith.

Most of us are struggling with feelings of inadequacy, anxiety and helplessness right now and that is when we need good enough faith. Jack Kornfield writes:

If you can sit quietly after difficult news,

If in a financial downturn, you remain perfectly calm,

If you can see your neighbors travel to fantastic places without a twinge of jealousy,

If you could happily eat whatever is on your plate,

If you can fall asleep after a day of running around without a drink or a pill,

If you can find contentment just where you are...

You are probably a dog.

This is the emergency we have been preparing for- time to break open the piggy bank of self-compassion- have a good enough faith.

If covid-19 refers as much to your scale as to the virus, it's good enough.

If Trevor Noah is the only news source you can stomach right now- its good enough.

Haven't put on a pair of pants for months- hey they will all feel brand new when you do- at least the top half of you is dressed, its good enough.

Hear these words of reassurance today, we are members of the body of Christ. Thanks be to God that body has many members, and we are members one of another.

Each of us, by the grace of God has been given different gifts;

On the days when you can't drag yourself out of bed; somebody in the body of Christ will take the wheel and steer us through the chaos.

If for a time, good enough faith seems even too much to expect, somebody in the body will hold onto the hope that brighter days will prevail.

For the body has many members and we are members one of another.

Some will teach so that others can learn, some will offer compassion when compassion seems scarce, some need to cling tightly to their resources right now while still others in a position to be generous, thank God the body has many members and the weight of the world does not rest on any one of us alone.

We are members one of the other and we were built to help each other, The pitcher cries for water to carry and a person for work that is real. It isn't always easy, this being part of a body; there's an old pastors joke that says if we are all part of the body of Christ somebody has to be the ass. If today is your day to be the ass- even that is good enough.

May the love of God bind us together and give us the strength we need to carry on.

Amen