

The everydayness of love

Let us pray – may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable and pleasing in your sight, oh God our strength and our redeemer. Amen

Today our hearts are broken, and we are in remembrance and stand in solidarity with our Asian American, Pacific Islander, South Asian, Korean friends, family, community - all people of Asian descent in their pain and grief at the devastating shooting this past week, the hate incidents, discrimination, harassment since the beginning of COVID-19 and the years and years of stereotyping, anti-Asian, anti-immigrant, xenophobic sentiments and attacks

In today's text, we hear words of promise from the prophet Jeremiah, where God initiates a new commitment, a covenantal relationship with Israel, a people out of slavery and oppression, yet in exile, and a long ways from home, struggling and sorrow-filled, and just like us in and out covenant with God, and God who has never left them, has a message of love and strength. The initial covenant was made a long time ago at Mount Sinai, and God in God's graciousness and faithfulness simplifies the law for them, from 613 codes to simply love, and the covenant is this: "I will be your God, and you will be my people." There is nothing that can separate us from the love of God

So like the Israelites, how do we today engage in a covenantal relationship with God that is rooted in love and supports us as we navigate the oppressive systemic realities of our world on a daily basis?

James Baldwin says that "Love takes off the masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within." – and he says that love is a state of grace.

Baldwin reminds that love is a hard work. Love requires vulnerability and can leave us feeling bare.

And so this covenant, this commitment that has now been simplified and written on our hearts is to help us, God wants us to remember that we are loved, that God loves us and that we love ourselves and love others.

In our context today, this promise of covenant plays out in the context of white supremacy, and white supremacist culture which also becomes the dominant culture and creates as Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun say in "explicit and subtle ways the norms and preferences for how we organize, make decisions, understand time, and how we see and interact with ourselves and others."

It can be hard to decipher as it can appear in the guise of keeping tradition, preserving history, and it resonates so deeply with the dominant or majority group that it feels like the norm, when it is at times merely white normativity

And the reality of it is that it impacts all of us on a daily basis, none of us can escape it.

Emilie Townes, a Christian ethicist, says the work of dismantling white supremacist culture requires a covenant, commitment, agreement as it “interrupts the mundane and comfortable in us, and calls us to move beyond ourselves and accept a new agenda for living hope” –

She further says this commitment to disrupt and dismantle is an everyday action, calling it *the everydayness of moral actions* – that it is what we do everyday that shapes us, “more than those grand moments of righteous indignation and action.”

I imagine for Israel, a people with their own practices, cultural norms, ways of doing things, they had to fight for their ways of being as an enslaved and oppressed people, so when God says to them, I will be your God and you will be my people, it is also in relation to restoring of all of who they are in light of all that has happened to them.

So in light of this, of anti-Asian, racist sentiments, and the reality of the societal structures we live in, what does it then mean for God to say that God is our God, and we are God’s people?

Essentially God is saying this:

Firstly, I will be your God in all the ways that you need me to be your God based on your lived experience, your social and geographic location, you and your family and your community’s histories, your life’s story and the things that have happened to you.

Secondly, when God says you will be my people, God claims us as God’s own, and we have a place of belonging just as we are.

God receives and accepts all of who we are, and encourages all of who we are, even if the society, the structures, the dominant culture can negate, nullify, push back on some of ways that POC, minority groups, black people, people of Asian descent, the oppressed, marginalized express themselves or do things, and sometimes those very things can be things that God is affirming about them, you are enough and loved, beautifully and wonderfully made in the image of God, and the way we look, how we talk, the kind of ideas we generate, the ways we create, the food we eat, is good enough.

Toni Morrison in *Beloved* reminds black people to love themselves, saying “they despise you, so you go to love you, they do not love your neck, put your hand on it and grace it”

James Cone says... in Jesus being the one who is oppressed, in siding with the oppressed they are set free to be who they are.

Maya Angelou teaches us to say I am a phenomenal woman, and it is the “swing in my waist, and the joy in my feet, the sun of my smile, the bend of my hair...that’s me”

And so given these realities, how do we then live into the everydayness of asserting the humanity and dignity of all?

This everydayness of love is about speaking out and living in our truths, from an understanding that your voice, expression and lived experience matters, within the realities of a white supremacist culture that might not affirm this, this way of stepping out of our comfort zones, this countercultural truth-telling is about the liberation of self and others, it is the daily dismantling of anti-Asian sentiments, of racism in all its overt and covert forms, and recognizing that we each have agency wherever we are to act towards justice everyday, doing the gradual work of turning this world right side up, to create a more inclusive world that centers the least of these humanity and dignity of all.

What in my everyday actions is upholding this system, what in my everyday actions is dismantling system?

Our habituation of love, our acceptance of God’s way is God’s putting love in our mind and writing love on our heart. We are secure in knowing that God is our God, and we are God’s people, each made in the image of God, and so all of who we are is welcome as is

MLK, Fannie Lou Hammer, and many others have said this in different ways: “no one is free until we are all free.” This new covenantal relationship has not been fully realized in us, we continue to wrestle, we keep trying everyday to love our neighbors who are different from us, this lived truth is our lived knowledge of God. We are reminded of God’s mercy and grace that is new every morning, and it is in this everydayness that we will all know God, from the least of them to the greatest, the days are surely coming says the Lord, the days are surely coming. Amen

