

Sunday December 16, 2021
First Lesson: Micah 5: 2-5a
Gospel Lesson: Luke 1: 46-55
Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

KJ Journal 12-16-21

We have come to the end of our renovation series and I hope that people feel like this sermon series has been meaningful to them. I know for myself and my family, we are seeing the evidence of renovation. I can tell that we have been spending even more time together; more than usual. Our conversations have been very meaningful. I personally feel within the life of the Church, things are beginning to fall into place as well. I am still celebrating how on Church Council on Tuesday, so many people showed up! Not to mention, even well after the meeting was over which was about 8:20pm, people still hung around for at least an hour; catching up, laughing; it was overall just a tremendous feeling of energy,

optimism, hope and love. I have never witnessed so much energy and optimism at a church council meeting before! I am still trying to process the mystery of it all. Wow...there is so much to think about. But for now...all I can say is Thank you!

KJ

Another personal journal entry for your reflection as we wrap up our sermon series Holy Renovation.

- And the main questions that I would like us to explore are questions that I am raising, with the hope that this conversation might bring this sermon series around full circle.
- So I would like us to begin to think on this; “How do you and I know when a personal renovation has occurred in our lives?”; Secondly, “How do we

know when our personal renovation has been complete?”

- For last week I ended the sermon on a rather high, hopeful and hope-filled note;
- For if you recall, I named that renovation is possible, renovation is happening, renovation is essentially here and it is occurring right now.
- And some who might be tempted to play the Devil’s Advocate might weigh in and suggest that I am perhaps being a little too ambitious to be even making these type of claims.
- For there really is no tangible evidence that things in the world are really getting better?
- For looking at the latest reports on this pandemic for instance; the new Omicron variant is now reporting to be 70 times more likely to impact people’s airways and is also changing the recent projections of Covid becoming an endemic anytime soon; something we all have been hoping

for; I just pray that this variant remains less severe than previous variants.

- Not to mention, the world as a whole is still experiencing major trauma; from the freaky tornados and wind and all of the damage that came from that; to school shootings and violence persisting, causing teachers to be driven to the edge; from the inflation of everything that is past the stage of tolerable; it could seem almost insulting to some for me to suggest that renovation is occurring.
- For how is renovation possible when the world is still falling a part?
- How is renovation occurring if there is data, facts and measurable reports that reflect a downward trend that would suggest otherwise?
- Bringing in our first lesson of Micah and our gospel of Luke 1: 46b-55 known as the Magnificat;

- Inquiring minds may also want to know how Micah could be making claims of how the people of Judah could ever hope to live secure; when the land flowing with milk and honey, which is the country of Israel; we soon over time learn that this was not something to be taken as literal; for the people had to work to discover their milk and honey potential....it was not immediately evident to the naked eye;
- Critics may also want to know how Mary the mother of Jesus could even be singing anything about praise, when she was still surrounded by scandal?
- If I were really wanting to be a Debbie downer in this sermon, heck I might as well take it all of the way there and ask why even go through the ritual of Advent every year?

- What is the point of waiting on a God who may to some may not even be real, or a God who for some; doesn't even seem to care?
- Why for instance; hold onto a faith in a world where the rich seems to be getting richer and the poor remains poor? (share my family story about the fraternal twins and the 2 month old baby)
- Why even bother dreaming in a world where those who subscribe to evil seems to still prosper and the meek and humble can't seem to catch a break?
- Why even dare to have hope in a world where favor really isn't fair;
- For sometimes things will happen in our lives that will not ever feel ok;
- For when the psalmist says *weeping may endure for a night, but joy will come in the morning;*
- Why have hope when the reality is that some of us are still weeping;

- Some may even question what is the point of it all anyway?
- What is the point of coming to church when our situation hasn't changed; in fact no one that we may know around us...situation has really changed?
- What is the point of doing what is right, when those who does what they want seems to be getting along just fine;
- And inquiring minds really want to know, at least I really want to know and before I say what I am about to say, I know I am jumping out of order in this Advent season by talking about Jesus death already;
- But I want to know why after Jesus died for instance, why were those disciples on Emmaus Road in Luke 24, so downtrodden;
- Why were their faces downcast;

- For centuries literally, prophets were awaiting the birth of this Savior Jesus;
- But after Jesus came, walked amongst the Earth for roughly 30 something years; after Jesus did all of these miracles and healings and for goodness sake people, Jesus turned water into wine....
- And I suspect it was good wine too!
- So with all of this said, how in the world was Jesus able to come and go; meanwhile humanity on the surface was still pretty much overall not phased;
- The disciples on that road were still perplexed as to what Jesus even came to do, when not only did Jesus die...Jesus was killed; so what was all of the fuss over Jesus then; if his impact was not fully received or understood?
- For on the surface, it may have even seemed that Jesus did not fulfill his mission;
- As an example, Luke 4 which was also prophesied in Isaiah 61; when it is said that Jesus proclaimed;

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, Because he
anointed me to preach good news to the poor: He
has sent me to proclaim release to the captives,
And recovering of sight to the blind, To set at
liberty them that are bruised;

- The fact of the matter is that there are people that are still poor spiritually, emotionally, literally and more;
- The fact of the matter is that there are still captives that have not been released;
- The evidence remains that people are still suffering; people are still bruised;
- So I ask again how do we know when renovation has occurred;
- How do we know when the renovation is complete?
- Should we all just give up on the idea of it altogether?

- You see I don't have the answer to any of these questions.
- **But what I do know through my quadrilateral assessment that John Wesley the founder of Methodism; encourages us all to approach scripture and life with is through four specific areas; Word, reason, tradition and experience;**
- I have learned that how we know that renovation is occurring, is it starts with us choosing to **exercise our faith**; even if it just a mustard seed...the Word of God informs us that even this type of faith will do just fine;
- For I came from a theological upbringing where in the Black Church experience and culture I was trained in, the word faith was something you heard frequently;
- Exercising one's faith in God was something highly encouraged;

- For it took some measure of faith for my people to be able to even face the day let alone face the world;
- For to be black in this country; dare I say depending on the hot topic being displayed in the media and depending on what catastrophe the world is going through at the moment; to be black in America; to be black even in Lincoln, NE; although I would have it no other way; it still doesn't always feel comfortable to be in this skin that I am in;
- Also if I am honest, this discomfort has made it especially tricky for me to navigate in cross cultural settings;
- This is another reason why I spent a healthy amount of time at the beginning of this series slowing things down and spending some time on communication— because I realize that culture often influences and informs language;

- I realize that culture often influences and informs everything.
- So I want you to know that 2 and a half years into this, I am finally beginning to feel as if I am part of this culture;
- I am finally feeling like I am part of this community....
- And how this process of renovation has occurred for me....is it started with me.....going back to what I believe as it pertains to faith.
- And my core belief that I must admit I felt somewhat intimidated to admit in the pulpit; primarily because we have a vast amount of learners in our community and culture;
- Not to mention, we have a vast amount of beliefs in our community; all which I value and would choose to have no other way;
- However, in the midst of this beautifully diverse community in every way, I guess I was afraid to

name that for me it still stands; you and I have to have faith; in fact I feel more courageous in naming that we must have faith; and it is then, only then; that renovation will occur not just within the life of our church community; but in our day to day lives;

- Furthermore, **once we choose to put our faith** in the idea that our latter days will be greater than our former;
- **Once we choose to put our faith** in a love that will have the final say;
- **Once we choose to put our faith** in this idea that the best is yet to come; as long as we choose to come to this understanding that **our free will choices in life** must be more intentional;
- **Our free will choices in life** must be more deliberate;
- **Our free will choices** in life must make a decision to submit to a better way;

- To submit to the loving way;
- This is when personal renovation begins to happen;
- For this is when the disciples were able to see more clearly that Jesus was on the road with them;
- This is how Micah in our first lesson was able to prophesy that the people of Judah would be in a place of security;
- This is how Mary was able to praise God in the midst of her own presumed scandal;
- For in each instance; although the concept of one's faith was different for each person;
- There was an awareness in each story; that there was something greater in the midst of their individual circumstance;
- In some of these stories, it was hard to describe what this greater presence was; for on the surface their situation hadn't really changed;

- For the people of Israel in our first lesson were **still in distress**;
- Mary the mother of Jesus **was still under** intense scrutiny;
- Heck even thinking back to the church council meeting that I named in my journal; the same could also be said; it was really tough stuff we were talking about; with no real convincing evidence that there was anything major to be celebrating;
- But yet even in these temporal realities;
- In all of these instances, **there was something greater** that encapsulated the people;
- **There was something greater** that began to stir within the spirits of humanity that offered a shift of perspective;
- Thereby making my takeaway from this sermon series is that we must not dismiss the **greater**;
- We must keep pursuing The **Greater**;

- And the reason why I am being somewhat ambiguous in naming this presence as the Greater, I guess is the same reason why God was just as ambiguous when Moses wanted to know what to call God and the consistent response of God was for Moses to call God, “I am”;
- For God told Moses in Exodus 3:14.. “I AM THAT I AM”
- And I think that this is mainly because God has given us all free will to keep exploring this truth;
- God has giving us all free will to keep exploring this statement “I am,”
- For my aha moment in my own leadership journey is that it is not for me to define the “I am,” for anyone;
- It is my role to name that the “I am,” is there...
- It is my role to name that the “I am,” is real....

- For the scriptures informs us that faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1)
- The longer I live, my quadrilateral engagement of this Hebrews passage understands this scripture as an invitation for each one of us to keep exploring the “I am” for ourselves.
- In fact this is what I suspect 2 Corinthians 5; *walk by faith and not by sight*; is really talking about;
- It is an invitation to respond to the Greater that cannot always be tangibly seen;
- We just innately know that it is there.....in fact if we think long and hard enough...it has always been there...
- Oh how I can hear the church mothers just about now belt out a song of praise ...too bad I cannot sing like them; perhaps one day I will have so much faith that I won't even care; but the words I leave you with are from the song:

Yes God Is Real

Bishop G.E. Patterson

There are some things

I may not know

There are some places

I can't go

But I'm sure

Of this one thing

That God is real

For I can feel

Him deep within

Yes, God is real

Real in my soul

Yes, God is real

For He has washed

And made me whole

His love for me

Is like pure gold

Yes, God is real
For I can feel
Him in my soul
Some folks may doubt
Some folks may scorn
All can desert
And leave me alone
But as for me
I'll take God's part
For God is real and I can feel
Him in my heart
I cannot tell
Just how you felt
When Jesus
Took all your sins away
But since that day
Yes, since that hour
God has been real
For I can feel

His holy power...

Let the Church say Amen and hallelujah!