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Matthew 11: 16-19, 25-30

### When the Children Cry Out

Creator God – may we have the humility to know we cannot do it all and may we have the faith to trust that we are far stronger than we could ever imagine. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all these gathered hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

“But to what shall I compare this generation?”

The flute plays and we do not dance.

The people cry out and we do not mourn.

A wild prophet in the desert who does not eat or drink doesn't appeal to us, but nor do we like the prophet who comes into our midst and sits at our tables.

We don't want anything to do with a God that shakes us up, shakes us out, and leaves us with nothing to do but wake up and recognize the truth.

We're too busy for all that!

But God doesn't care how busy you are – in fact – God would love it if you'd find some ways to slow down and rest occasionally – because in order to live the life God is calling us to, we're going to need to be well-rested.

We reached the conclusion last week of Jesus' teachings to his disciples – the warnings, the lessons, the predictions of the reception that they'll face along the way.

To re-cap: they're not going to be warmly welcomed.

And now, as we see Jesus return to his own ministry of teaching and preaching, we get a little insight into how all of that is going so far.

And in case you missed it – it's not going well.

What is there to say about this generation???

We were right here in front of you and you turned away – back to your routines and structures and deceptively safe way of life.

Jesus reproaches the generation who turns a closed ear to the dancing and the cries of the prophets – and he rebukes entire cities that turned away from his ministries.

Verses 20-25, which we skip over in the lectionary, are given the joyful heading of “Woe to Unrepentant Cities” in the NRSV Bible.

These are places, people, who had the healing presence of God right in front of them, the truth of God present in Jesus – and instead of being will to be changed – they choose to look away.

To close their eyes.

And shut their ears.

To continue going about their lives – as though the miraculous had not just happened in their midst.

They wrote John the Baptist and Jesus the Nazarene off the same way most of us react to prophets.

By saying they’re a little too out there for polite, mainstream society. If only they worked the appropriate channels, dressed differently, cleaned up their language, didn’t seem QUITE so angry – then, of course, we’d be open to hearing their truth.

But as Jesus notes – it doesn’t matter if the prophets are fasting or eating – you could try to play by ALL the rules, jump through ALL the hoops, and still... most of us – especially those of us with a little power and comfort – will choose not to listen.

Tom Long writes of this passage, “To be blind to the truth is surely a sad thing, but to have one’s eyes opened and then to choose to shut them tight again is to be liable to the judgment of God.”<sup>1</sup>

“To have one’s eyes opened and then to choose to shut them tight again is to be liable to the judgment of God.”

Church – everywhere I go it seems like, in so much of what I’m listening to, the White Privilege Curriculum, our social media feeds – the phrase I hear repeated again and again is, “I never knew...” I’ve said it and thought it more than a few times.

What we learn in school – the stories we pass on – the media we consume – for so, so long has presented such a limited view of the world. Has told such a narrow version of our history in this country.

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Long, Matthew Commentary, pg. 130

The rest of our history – the complicated, messy, painful history has always been there, we’ve just mostly lived in a world that doesn’t tell us about it.

We’ve lived in a world where we haven’t had to know it.

But we’re starting – finally – to live in a world where our eyes are being opened.

And if we have our eyes opened and then choose to shut them tight again – dear ones, I fear for where our country, where our communities, will end up.

We’re being given a chance right now – as we’ve been given the chance before – to actually open ourselves to the truth of us.

The truth of this country.

The truth of us as individuals.

And on this Fourth of July weekend – it feels only right that we urge ourselves and we urge one another – to keep our eyes open.

Even when it’s painful, even when it’s uncomfortable, even when it makes us feel defensive and angry inside – let’s keep our eyes and ears open. Let’s keep our hearts open.

Now, you might well ask – in a time when it feels like we’re sometimes living in different realities from one another... how do we recognize the truth when it’s in front of us??

Every person will tell you they have the truth – God-given or otherwise – how will we recognize the prophets from the fearmongers?

God’s truth will always have liberation, freedom, and respect for ALL human life at its core.

Fundamentally, the Good News which Jesus brings is a word of healing, a word of hope, a word of freedom from oppression and the breaking of chains.

In a world where ALL of us are bound in some way or another by systems of oppression, the Gospel Good News invites us to freedom.

“Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest.”

Recognizing the truth – one of the most fundamental of which is – God is God, you & I are not – will bring rest.

If you going to stay in this – eyes and ears and heart wide open – you will need to take time for rest. You will need to tend your heart, your mind, your body.

We will need to trust that God is working on this too – it won't all come crashing down if we step back for a little while.

Acknowledging the truth of our past – while painful – WILL bring us rest and healing. I deeply believe that.

Until we know the fullness of our stories, until we acknowledge the pain of our stories, we have no chance of being healed. We have no chance of laying down the burden.

We'll just drag it around with us forever, pretending we don't see it, pretending it doesn't infect our hearts and minds and our bodies.

Cornel West writes, "To be a Christian is to live dangerously, honestly, freely - to step in the name of love as if you may land on nothing, yet to keep on stepping because the something that sustains you no empire can give you and no empire can take away."

To be a Christian is to bear the yoke of Jesus – a burden that is light because it brings freedom.

Not freedom of the numb kind, freedom of the courageous, fierce and gentle kind.

West also writes this,

"The country is in deep trouble. We've forgotten that a rich life consists fundamentally of serving others, trying to leave the world a little better than you found it. We need the courage to question the powers that be, the courage to be impatient with evil and patient with people, the courage to fight for social justice."

Somehow, along the way, as we've tried to numb our pain and quell our fears, as we've tried our darndest to control every little aspect of our lives and our world, we've forgotten that fundamental truth.

A rich life is not about how much wealth you procure while living it.

It's not about how much power you get.

It's not even about how history tells your story, if history tells your story.

A rich life is about serving others. About living in relationship – equal, free, live-giving relationship with others.

It's about loving others and seeing them as God sees them – beloved, worthy children of God.

A rich life requires a great deal of faith in things unseen – in the goodness of people, in our potential for change.

A rich life will call us to courage. To contemplation. To action.

And we can trust – as we pursue that rich life, we will meet God and discover that our burdens are lifted. At least some days.

When we hear God’s voice in the histories we were never told, we’ll discover healing in the learning.

And when we stumble as we surely will – when we fall into the trap of trying to BE God instead of trying to find God in the world, in ourselves – we will fall into the arms of grace.

Arms which receive us over and over and over again.

As long as we keep our eyes open.

May we have the courage to hear the truth spoken to our generation.

May we have the strength to dance when the flutes play and mourn when the wails cry out.

And may we have the wisdom to recognize the truth when its in front of us.

Looking to our children may be a good place to start.

May we keep our eyes and ears open.

Watch:

“What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NBe5qbnkqoM&feature=youtu.be>