

Fearful or Filled

Stanton Reformed Church

October 6, 2019

Focus: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice; they will be filled.

Function: Justice/right-ness in our lives and in our world will be filled when we allow ourselves to hunger and thirst for it.

Do/Think: Awareness and Action

Our bodies work very hard to keep physiological balance, to maintain our temperature, to regulate our vital signs and to retain and use fluids and nutrients.

If we are in cold weather, what happens? Our hands and feet get cold first. Why? To maintain the temperature of our core.

Or how about when it's hot out - what happens? We sweat. As much as we try to hide it, sweating is the amazing bodily function that lowers our body temperature. why? To create balance.

And when our bodies tell us that we are hungry, we head to the refrigerator or reach into the cabinet.

Of course there are people, neighbors even, right here in Hunterdon County who

experience food insecurity, but most of us have access to plenty.

And thirst too... we have plenty. Our faucets produce clean water. And when we don't want water from the tap, there is energy water infused with potassium and Vitamin D or carbonated water flavored with pomegranate juice to quench our thirsts.

We don't really know hunger or thirst so when Jesus uses the image of someone hungering and thirsting, he's already lost us.

And he loses us even more when he uses the word righteousness or justice.

In Hebrew, they are one in the same.

It was always translated justice until the 16th century when William Tyndale translated it into an Old English word that became the word righteousness.

Over time, the english language began to make a distinction between justice and righteousness...

Righteousness was seen as more of an individual state of morality or holiness. Righteousness was a vertical issue - me and God.

Justice on the other hand was a horizontal issue - human to human, community to community.

It turns out we can't really have one without the other. We can't have true balance, or wholeness, wellness unless both the vertical relationship of God and me and the horizontal relationship of me and thee, of us, are both healthy.

Jesus felt it. He felt the imbalance in the world. He knew our collective temperature was off, our vitals were out of wack. We are not well.

And so he says, Blessed are those who are famished or parched for justice because they will be filled.

I wonder in what way were his disciples hunger and thirsting for righteousness.

Were they feeling the affects of the unrest in their world? Did they yearn for the world to be right again? Were they in touch with the lack of balance in their world?

Are we?

Sure I think we can point to issues in the world that are falling apart. We can tell each other stories we have read in the news.

But do any of those stories cause us to be parched or famished for justice?

Or are we removed enough from the stories of injustice that we don't feel the hunger or thirst for justice?

Let me tell you a story.

There is a restaurant in Manhattan going out of business and they are blaming the rise of minimum wage to \$15/hour.

The truth is, as the reporter found, they are going out of business because they could no longer provide the produce their customers had counted on...

In this case it was fresh tacos. Well, you know what they did first with the wage hike? They fired the two old ladies who made the homemade tortillas for the fresh tacos.

Huh. This story makes us turn our head and wonder, squint our eyes maybe. That doesn't seem right or just.

But then sadly, we go about our business because there are a lot of places to get tacos. And the little old ladies aren't in our family.

But it doesn't quite hit home enough for us to feel our temperature rise or our vitals out of wack.

But then something closer to home hits...

Like a few weeks ago one of our members stumbled upon the local republican party was flying the confederate flag as they helped folks register to vote.

Racism is alive right here. People feel unsafe or unwelcome, in their hometown.

This story causes some unrest. We feel a temperature change in our community.

Our vitals are not what we thought they were.

Our community is not well. What can we do?
What ought we to do?

One more story - much harder.

This week, a teenager in town died by
suicide. It's possible opioids were involved.

This morning across town, there is a family
readying themselves for a funeral service.

Tomorrow teachers and students will
descend on Hunterdon Center filled with grief
and uncertainty.

We feel the imbalance of this for sure. Our
collective temperature is off, our vitals are out
of wack, there is something wrong, our
community is not well.

But what can we do?

Let's look at it this way -

Let's go back to the taco place...

Imagine with me the two women who lost their jobs. It is the morning after and they are drinking coffee at their own breakfast table and they are praying the 23rd psalm.

The Lord is my shepherd,
I shall not want...
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
He leads me beside still waters.
He restores my soul.

There are people like those two ladies in our everyday life that we not even notice...

The people who wash our dishes when we dine out, the guys who clean our cars, the people who check out our groceries.

And go with me to the table where the confederate flag is being flown, out in the open, associated with the right to vote.

Imagine there is a family walking beside the table. They just moved into Flemington and they work at the salt factory. The color of their skin is brown.

Later that night, the mother is putting the children to bed and as a prayer, she also says,

The Lord is our shepherd;
We lack nothing.
God guides us in the path of righteousness.
Even though we walk through the valley of death, we will fear no evil for God is with us.

There are people closer than we think who experience fear because of reckless language in our public spaces.

And then finally, let's all go with this family, to be present with them as they get ready for the funeral this morning.

Let us pray for them, that God would indeed be their shepherd. That they would want for nothing.

Let us pray for them to feel the presence of the community around them as being anointed with oil,
That their cup would overflow.
And that goodness and mercy would follow them all the days of their lives.

It turns out, we are parched and famished for justice.

We know our temperature is off. We feel the imbalance in our community vital signs.

That is what it means to hunger and thirst for justice.

This feeling of unrest is what it means to understand that right relationship with God is interconnected with right relationships with one another.

The Lord is our shepherd...
Might God lead us in paths of righteousness
For God's name sake.
Amen.