

Jesus' focus in today's Gospel reading is not just about the miraculous actions of healing and ministry he performs - it's on the reality of what will happen to the people who follow him. The new reality that Jesus creates. The kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven coming nearer.

There is great comfort in these words of Jesus that we absolutely can and should lean on in our moments of struggle and pain. When we weep, we can remember by the power of God that we will laugh again. When we are hungry, we will receive food and nourishment again. When we experience poorness of any kind, there will be abundance from God's great love for us. When we are reviled, or hated, or persecuted, we will find love again, perhaps in the most unlikely of places. Where there is pain in the world, Jesus promises to turn things right side up again, throwing down that which oppresses and chains and instead freeing us in new life and abundant love. Jesus, in his death and resurrection, defeated sin and death and the powers that defy God so that we can live into God's promises of new and abundant life, and be united with all our beloved people by the power of the communion of saints.

But when we read today's story, there are parts that can feel troubling for us - what if we have found this wealth of abundant life? Jesus says woe to us who are full and laughing - we will be hungry again, we will mourn and weep - this doesn't sound like new or abundant life! What's going on?

The first thing we need to understand is that the kingdom of God is not a zero sum game. Just because someone has less than you do, doesn't mean their eventual abundance will come at the expense of your abundance. God's kingdom envisions and embodies life abundant for all people - abundant love and grace and goodness as part of creation beyond our limited, human understanding. Just as we talked about the unfathomable abundance of God's love in last week's sermon, so today we hear more of what God's abundance truly looks and feels like.

Abundant life is not synonymous with constant consumption, comfort, accessibility, and affluence. Abundant life means that there is a richness, a

depth, a true living into the expanse of what life can be and is for us humans. Jesus speaks to this - we may not always be in a season of laughing, and we may not always be in a season of mourning. We are not always in seasons of being reviled, and we are not always in seasons of pure rejoicing. There are cycles to life that allow us to truly feel the highs and lows and empathize with our fellow people. Empathy and understanding are the two hardest but most powerful ways we can both feel the fullness of being human and truly live out our call to love our neighbors. Instead of proving our rightness, or why we should always have abundance in exactly the way we envision for ourselves, we center the abundance of our attention, our gifts, our selves, on the goodness of humanity and creation. This centering on our fellow people, on these cycles of life, on bringing God's vision for bringing the kingdom of heaven nearer, is where we find this abundance of life.

Trusting in God's vision for abundant life and the kingdom of heaven is healing in innumerable ways. Jesus heals the people in this story in body, mind, and spirit - the three interconnected parts of who we are as humans. Healing takes place physically at the beginning of this story, when Jesus cures the diseases the people come to him with. Healing takes place spiritually, when Jesus casts out unclean spirits from those who are gathered, and speaks these words to a great crowd of people, yearning to be spiritually fed by the Messiah. And healing takes place mentally, with the words, lessons, crucial teachings that Jesus provides the people gathered.

Oftentimes our bodies need healing before we can begin mental or spiritual healing, as our bodies hold onto trauma, memories, and insights in a powerful way beyond our mental understanding. This is true not only for the people gathered here with Jesus, but especially for us today. Taking care of our neighbors' physical needs, like ample food, water, housing, warmth, clothing, clean air, medicine, and safety is the necessary first step for any other type of healing. Engaging in this bodily healing, this physical act of abundant love, is what immediately connects us all as humans - more than any type of spiritual or mental belief or situation. It's why the physical element of the sacraments is so important. They are reminders that God

shows up for us in the everyday elements of physically living life - water, and our daily bread. And from this initial connecting place of physical care, being able to tangibly see and feel and taste the abundant goodness of God, we can begin to address the deeper spiritual and mental realities of humanness and healing that we so desperately need.

I pray that we can be agents of God's healing in spirit and mind, by the life and teachings and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Remembering that there is new life amidst and beyond the spiritual and mental cycles of life is life-savingly helpful important not only for ourselves but for others too. God has love abundant enough to bring healing and new life to every single one of us, and we need never worry that we are asking God for too much. God will always show up, God will always listen, God will always be our God of abundant love, goodness, and grace, no matter what.

These promises of God's abundance and our promises to do what we can to bring the abundance of God nearer to all people, form the basis of the baptismal promises we will hear and speak later on in today's service as we baptize Evan, beloved child of God. We promise to work for justice and peace, which includes peace in all parts of ourselves, body, spirit, and mind. We promise to continue to carry on the traditions of the faith and the teachings of Christ with the Lord's Prayer, 10 commandments, and bringing our children to worship in community together. And above all, we are reminded of the stories of how God has worked through people to ensure that this kingdom is brought near. God worked through Moses to guide the Israelites from slavery into freedom. Jesus worked with the woman at the well who came to believe through the living water, and the community around her believed in Christ through the powerful testimony of this unlikely woman. And God worked through John the Baptist and continues to work through the holy sacrament of baptism to ensure us that the promises of goodness and mercy, wisdom and might, steadfast presence, and abundant love are truly for us all, in every time and place.

There is great healing to be found in the promises of God, made through Christ Jesus, in our bodies, minds, and spirits, that there is hope yet to

come. The cycles of life may throw us off course sometimes, but sometimes they call us back to lead a life of love and service. Jesus is always there to guide us back home to the God who creates and loves us each and every day. May you find blessing in the abundance of life, its ups and downs, highs and lows, and find the inherent goodness woven into our world from the very beginning, by the grace and love of God. Thanks be to God, Amen.