

I discovered, in fact, that Voice to text software works!

For those of you either online or here who want to come back and read what's been said, because it was that interesting and you were doing your shopping list somewhere in the back of your mind the first time (laughter), you now have a pretty accurate recreation of the musings of my mind - which hopefully will continue to make for a more organic worship experience.

I want to call your attention to a visual about where it is that we're headed (pointing to the Christ candle and the bouquet of flowers on the communion table). So last week online, and I think it was Garreth who was up here, we got a text message that said that the floral arrangement was impeding someone's view to the Christ candle. And we moved the flowers aside because that was the quickest way to adjust.

Today, the flowers now are taking their place and the Christ candle has been brought further into the congregation. Spontaneous intuition, and all of the other things that we have been talking about, for how long is it been, nine weeks, are beginning to happen. Nine weeks? Wow. Are you sick of us yet? (laughter) Anyway, all these things are where we're headed with today's message.

There are two things that I would like you to leave with today. The first is to ask yourself this question. And take some time to think about it. Not necessarily just today. But for as long as you continue to be a member of this community in whatever way you feel called to be. When you are having a conversation about Augustine, who do you say that we are? Again, when you are having a conversation about Augustine, who do you say that we are?

And the second is again the thought of the week. What does it mean to accept with Grace the responsibility that your gifts come with? Because when we accept our gifts with grace, it moves them from being a burden, to being our response. That's why this struck me (pointing to the flowers and the Christ candle). Instead of being a burden to each other, the flower and the candle, they accept their responsibility and are both taking their rightful place in our worship experience.

Now here is something that I don't want you to come away with. We talked about this in our little music brainstorming meeting about a week and a half ago. Two weeks? I can't remember. Anyway, we said that for the longest time we would come to a House of worship like this one to be scolded. And to be constantly told that you were not doing enough.

Which in its day and age may have served its purpose, but not so much anymore. So, if you're hearing "he's about to tell me that we're not doing enough", or "doesn't he know we're tired", please put that out of your mind. Of course, we're tired. Everybody is tired. There's a lot of work to be done. Because taken too narrowly, the passage that we just read can do just that: Make you think that you are not doing enough, even if you are rightfully tired.

Think instead about how "Petros" and "Petra" make our passage sound a whole lot different when you hear the masculine and the feminine together side by side? And notice that I didn't use the word male or female? Because we all have so-called masculine traits and the feminine traits. Petros and Petra taken together come to symbolize the unification of creation and wisdom right there (pointing again to the flowers and the Christ candle).

Let's go further into the scriptures and look at the things that we were asked to look at. This idea of Jesus now being anointed, as opposed to our limited understanding of Savior, opens up a whole bunch of things for us. In pre-Kingdom Israel, Israel and the 12 tribes were governed by a series of circuit judges. And much of our legal system and Methodist circuit riders, of which we would have known a lot about here in the Prairies, along with parts of southern Ontario where I was, is founded on this kind of thing. That these arbiters of wisdom didn't necessarily have the final say, but they were set apart in order to facilitate conversation so that people could discern what the right thing was.

So, in what sense is Jesus anointed? I think that what we're being told today is that Peter understood that what went wrong was that those people who feared Jesus, tried to judge him by the very type of leadership that they were offering, which was to segregate everybody into their social casts.

The last one is Hades. Now understand that this is a very, very particular use of the word where on a rare occasion, ancient Israel and ancient Greece agree. We won't get into the whole history about how the Greek empire found pretty much everything about Israelite theology abhorrent. And perverse and distorted, so they tried to exterminate it out of existence. But that this idea, that evil is born out of nothingness, that evil is born out of nothing, is the absence of this kind of creation where Petros and Petra merge. And that is what we're called to speak into. The evil itself, yes, is there. The injustice of the world, yes, as it comes into our eyes and affects our heart, is there.

But the response, the grace with which we will all accept our gifts, calls us to speak into the void in people's lives with the same respect. And, then the harmony of God's creation is felt.

Now I haven't been in Manitoba long enough to understand how this passage speaks to our local context. Particularly when we say that one of the things that we do in God's name here is to be a "treaty people." I can empathize. But I don't know enough about the particularities of the language yet, so today I am intentionally not going to go there, not out of disrespect. On the contrary. Out of respect, before I can at least be brought up to speed on how to do this. And so, I will instead insert the thinking of a theologian friend of mine whose name is Brigid Maya Douglas. She is the interim minister at Bloor St. United right now in Toronto, and she is a Black woman of Jamaican descent from the South Shore of Montreal. Recently she had her application for PhD thesis approved and published. And she writes about what racialized people experienced, Black racialized people experienced, during the pandemic in Toronto. And she leads us to this devastating place of not just being pushed aside, but of being so inconsequential that Black people in Toronto, she says, began to feel literally invisible.

And the context that she uses is that *do not think that when the pandemic was on and people were going into food banks that you still had those long lines of people, all jostling for position.* We would know some of this. I'm sure that when the Oak Table began to be able to serve people not in -50-degree temperatures outside but allowing people inside our doors again. She said it was incredible to witness how one Black person in a room all by themselves would garner almost no attention. Now, perhaps she's particularly sensitive to that because of her background, and she had mentioned that in her writings. Her point is that our response, beyond speaking to the injustice of racializing people, is to speak into the somethingness of that person's life just because they happened to be there in the moment.

So. When we talk about Augustine, you'll notice that I've intentionally left the end of it open-ended. What is Augustine? The United Congregation? Oak Table? Splash? Something more? Why are we here? Who do we say that we are?

The last thing that I want you to hear is this. If you feel alone and isolated because this congregation has sat on the margins of what is considered mainstream for too long, there are words of encouragement for you in today's passage. There is a Canadian bias, I think, that says that anything that we ever innovate, we lose. Think about this for a second. We lost the fish. We lost paper. We are making a mess of oil and gas. We lost Blackberry. And I mean, NORTLE literally lied to us about their profits and killed huge portions of the economy of the West Island where I'm from and half of Ottawa. So much so that the Federal Government had to move the Department of National Defense from one part of the city to another in order to save Kanata.

There is nothing that's ever going to be changes if we do not accept our gifts with the grace. So, if you are feeling isolated because you have sat on the margins for too long trying to innovate, (How long? O Lord, how long? Says the Psalm) Listen to the words of the Call to Worship. Without, the courage of those people back in Babylon to pick up and actually go home and try again, Augustine would not even begin to exist without that. If you are feeling isolated, here, the significance of this last piece of Caesarea Phillip will speak to. It is the birthplace of the Greek God Pan: the mythical creature of half man – half goat. From there we get the pan flutes. We even get the concept of being pan-sexual. And that is Matthew putting his finger in the eye of the Greek world. Matthew refuses to simply disappear.

Whatever it is that we do, however it is that we feel called, remember. That it is not so much whether we have the checklists right, but that we trust that we are gifted enough to speak and be in the so-called nothingness of someone else's life to lift them out of the of the captivity it creates, and to have them live in the light instead. In God's name. Amen.