

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

Mark 4:35-41

Job 38:1-11

Psalm 107:1-3,23-32

2 Corinthians 6:1-13

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The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

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Richard Rohr once wrote “pain that is not transformed is transmitted.” I want us to take that in for a moment. What does that statement say to you? For me, it says a couple of things. The first is that we have to take responsibility for how we *respond* to difficult things in our lives. The second is that pain doesn’t have to define our future. The third is that we can use our pain to create something better, for ourselves and for others.

Pain that is not transformed is transmitted.

I want to be clear...I am not suggesting that pain is a good thing or that anyone deserves pain. The idea of transforming our pain doesn’t justify it. What Rohr is saying is that when we approach our pain with God at the center, we begin to find strength and comfort and hope for a better tomorrow. We start to see that pain doesn’t have the last word. Instead, we discover we are a beautiful, loved child of God and that God is going to use all of who we are for good.

And, we have a couple of wonderful texts this morning to help us understand how our faith teaches us to utilize a transformational approach to pain...how we respond, how we don’t let it define our future, and how we use it for good.

Let’s start with Job...the classic text of adversity. It centers on a critical question in relation to pain...does Job love God because God blesses him with a rich and fulfilled life or can Job love and follow God without these things? How will Job’s pain define his future? Will it make him bitter or more faithful?

Likewise, in Mark, we find Jesus and the disciples in the middle of a terrible storm. The disciples are afraid they are going to die and become angry at Jesus for not freeing them from their fear and calming the storm. In this story...what is at the heart of what they expect from Jesus? Will they put their faith in Jesus and transform their fear into hope? Or, will they succumb to the storm and fall away from God all together because they didn’t get what they wanted?

Both of these stories are centered around one of the hardest issues of our faith...where is God when we hurt? Because if you believe God has abandoned you in your pain, you might be unable to move through it toward a more hopeful tomorrow. You might certainly turn your back on God.

But...if you believe God is with you throughout your pain, that’s when hope can emerge and transformation can begin.

If you are like Job or the disciples, you might feel you don’t deserve the struggles you are facing. You might be angry at God. You might find faith useless because God hasn’t fixed the pain. I know so many people who are burdened by this line of thinking. God is easy to blame when we hurt so deeply. We need someone to blame, a reason to point to, a way to justify what’s

happened to us. We might even wonder what all of our prayers were even about. Did they matter?

I want to offer this to you...pain and loss are woven into our lives. Not because God has let us down or abandoned us but because we live in a broken and sinful world. We make choices we regret. We encounter people whose intentions are not good. We get sick. We fail. Sometimes pain is of our own making. At other times, we are unfortunately the recipients of pain we never asked for and that we surely didn't deserve.

But, Job reminds us that the world is made up of good and bad but that doesn't point to a God who has failed us or abandoned us. Good and bad are simply products of our humanity. Life will unfold in ways that challenge us and push us and yes, at times, hurt us.

Brennan Breed, professor at Columbia Theological Seminary, states that, *"...life is a process of expanding and unfolding and growth, but it also must include death and receding and collapsing. Growth and decay are two sides of the same coin. For growth to occur, some things must fail...God does not so much answer Job's questions as re-frame them and offer Job a new way to see the world in which his grief and his experiences are not the end or the entirety of the story."*

Here's another important point to take to heart....In the Gospel of Mark, the disciples are NEVER without Jesus during the storm. When things get hard, when pain and fear take over, Jesus is right there with them. When they are tossed about, so is Jesus. When the wind and water wash over them, they wash over Jesus as well. Jesus is in the middle of the storm and he is there when the sun shines after the storm. At NO point had Jesus abandoned his disciples. At NO point did God turn his back. It was instead the exact opposite.

I want us to go back for a moment to Richard Rohr's statement, "...pain that is not transformed is transmitted." How might you understand that through our texts this morning? I suggest that what we learn is that we can respond to our pain with open hearts when we remember that God is with us in every moment of every day. We have never been abandoned and have been washed in God's love even in our lowest moments. When we claim that truth we can stand up and respond with a hopeful vision for the future.

When we claim that truth we believe that God has a purpose for us even in the moments we don't feel worthy or good, when we feel damaged and alone. That's when we must remember that God has been experiencing all of that pain right along with us and we never have to carry the burden alone. And that's when we begin to see the glimmer of hope start to transform our hearts and minds, revealing God's beautiful purpose for us, reminding us that God has been with us through the storm, and God will be with us on the other side.

God calls us to step forward and live. Folks, that's the power of transformation, the transformation that comes from knowing and believing that God has been with you throughout it all. Thanks be to God. Amen.