

"Why Me?"
Rev. Kelly Jane Forbush
First Church of East Hartford
February 1, 2015

Please Note: These are notes to a lively sermon, hopefully more akin to poetry or spoken word than a lecture or academic paper. Physical movement and delivery cannot be captured on the page, but I hope this gives you a glimpse of what was shared in worship. This Sunday in particular included some impromptu responses.

Third week of our "Ask Questions" series.

"Why do children and teens die?"

"Why do bad things happen to good people?"

"Why me?"

lots of theories,

but the one that has struck my soul is shaped by Karen Baker Fletcher:
a womanist process theologian.

She writes out of the experience of being a black woman in modern-day America.

she has experienced the hurt of sexism and racism,
and her understanding of God seeks to understand
the extreme violence and hatred many have faced.

Some suffering is a result of the natural world working to keep the earth going.

Hurricanes and snow storms are not inherently evil,
they result from the churning of the sea -
without which the waters would lay stagnant and life would die,
and we know now that when too many animals die,
the web of life is thrown off-kilter and we ultimately cannot survive.

The movie "InterStellar" is based on this idea.

Science has also shown us that many illnesses can be traced to micro-organisms,
fighting for their place in the web of life.

The pain caused by these natural occurrences produces suffering.

And then there is suffering that is the result of evil choices.

This suffering is the massacre of life

This suffering is the meditated destruction of a people

This suffering is marked by our fellow humans turning on each other.

Science may explain some of the suffering in the world,

suffering that results from the natural world pushing to survive.

We turn this morning to an explanation of suffering induced by humanity.

PRAYER

[Gen 1:1-3]

In the beginning there was a chaotic
and then God created...

and called it good.

and then God created...

and called it good.

Gen 1:31 God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.

God took the chaos of the world and ordered it into goodness.

Plants and animals provide food for one another.

The water on the earth flows through the water cycle that we might drink of life.

We continue to find beauty in the world -

in nature, in loved ones, in communities of care.

God gave humanity the freedom to choose.

You are not a robot, you make decisions about how to spend your time and what to do.

You may not have unlimited choices, but you are not an inanimate puppet.

Rather, you are living, breathing, human being.

The first choice: to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil,

or obey God and refrain.

n.b. If there is a tree of knowledge of good and evil,

we can assume that good and evil existed even before Adam and Eve eat the fruit.

How else could there be a tree of such knowledge if both good and evil did not exist?

Well they eat from the tree, and the hiding and blaming begins.

Ashamed, they attempt to hide their trespass from God.

When they are found,

The man blames the woman, who blames the snake.

Humanity is banished from the garden of plenty

and the first murder takes place in the very next chapter.

How much hurt is rooted in hiding, blaming, and stealing?

Karen Baker Fletcher: "God did not create evil, but God created all of creation in freedom." (79)

Why does God give us such freedom?

So that we can love.

As we lifted up in Communion,

God calls us the Beloved

- that we may be loved and love.

Love is not love if it is forced or coerced or controlled.

That would be abuse, not love.

So God gives us the freedom to truly love.

With the freedom to choose, humanity can choose to love and also to hurt.

Adam and Eve chose to love one another.

Adam and Eve chose to steal the one fruit they are told not to have.

Cain and Abel chose to worship God and bring forward offerings.

Cain chose jealousy and murder.

The people of Israel chose at times to care for the sick,

other times they did not.

Sometimes people listened to the prophets - like Jonah.

Sometimes, not so much.

Some choices generate love in our world,
Some choices add to the working of evil.

Either way, we don't always get a direct pay-back for what we put in.
Life isn't like Chuckie Cheese - do five good deeds and you can cash in for a pony.

Our choices have a more communal impact.

Example:

The choice to turn on the light and use electricity seems innocent enough.
But if that electricity is generated from a coal-fired power plant,
it has contributed to air pollution,
which we know instigates asthma in the surrounding population.

Example:

The food I choose to buy impacts the producers and the environment.

So,

Sometimes the choice is hard and we are burdened down by forces that feel out of our control.

God saw how we struggled to figure out how to use our freedom to love.
and so God came to earth to guide us in the man of Jesus.

In our story this morning,

Jesus encounters a man plagued by demons,
Jesus encounters evil in the world.

What happens?

The demons cry out, "have you come to destroy us?!"

Yes. That is exactly the point.

Jesus came to destroy the demons, to banish evil, to overcome the deepest despair.

The Gospel of Mark doesn't describe the process of the exorcism,
because the point is that Jesus has the power to banish evil.

Evil is diminished when we follow Jesus,
when the choice is hard,

we can literally ask the question, WWJD?

What we find is one who eats with all sorts of people,
one who calls out injustice
one who chooses life and healing over strict rules.

Evil is diminished when we form the Beloved Community Jesus called for.

When we live into that reality,
we push out evil.

But Jesus is not just a mentor or a guide to follow.

In the resurrection,

we see a God more powerful than shame, blame, conspiracy, betrayal, and death.

In the resurrection,

we see a God that pushes for love against all odds.

So, if we believe that God takes the chaos and orders life towards goodness.

and if we believe that God gives us the freedom to love,

we are called to use the freedom God has granted us to truly love and seek the well-being of all creation.

In the moments of chaos and suffering, may we move towards goodness.

In the moments of choosing, may we seek the love and well-being of all creation.

In the moments of despair, may we trust and hope in a God that will carry us past the cross and into resurrected life. Amen.