

THE LOST SOUL FINDS ITS WAY

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Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

Second Sunday in Lent

Based on Mark 8:27, 31-37. "Take up your cross and follow me."

"This I know," says the great German mystic Meister Eckhart, "that the only way to live is like the rose, which lives without a why."

Good advice! For those who have reached a certain state of enlightenment!

As for we mere mortals, we are doomed to demand a reason:

WHY half a million COVID deaths in this country alone, even WITH twelve months of mask-wearing and social distancing?

WHY blackouts blanketing Texas lead to expanded fortunes for the very power companies that failed the people?

WHY some of our fellow citizens still believe the presidential election was stolen?

WHY the expanding Eastern Panhandle Pipeline supplying fossil fuel energy to unwanted heavy industry in Jefferson County has to run through my property?! Literally! They tell my husband they will have to dig up his garden, suffocating the glorious creation he has tended since we moved to this piece of land with climate killing fossil fuels.

WHY, WHY, WHY!?

Jesus, in his first century wisdom, has given us an answer: human power, in all of its original divine glory, has gone destructively amok.

We have collectively forgotten who we really are and to whom we really belong: humans from the humus bearing the very breath of God.

And because we have forgotten, we look out for number one. Neglecting the rest of creation. Neglecting the Beloved Community we were created to be. Because we are afraid.

We need a job, so we sell ourselves out. Our kids need health insurance, so we sell out a bit more. We want to survive, so we go all the way. Dying in our depths just a little bit more each time. Clinging to that life which really is death, as our poet Julia Esquivel describes.

This is what Jesus means when he says, "Those who want to save their life will lose it." Because let's be honest. Most of us, if we live *well* in this country, have lost it. Sometimes, as those who are teaching us about White privilege have argued, without even knowing it.

Asylum seekers, refugees, immigrants, and international students have to become our teachers.

For example, did you know that of the 130 million doses of coronavirus vaccine that have been deployed globally, a full 75% of them have served ten countries? Almost 130 countries with 2.5 billion people have not received a single dose.

Only one third of Africa will be vaccinated by the end of this year, while you and I relish the thought of returning to the sanctuary by September.

If you really want to follow me, Jesus says, if you really want to save your life, you and I - like "Rocky" - will have to relinquish our yearning for a savior to come swooping in and set us selfishly free from COVID, from climate change, from our uncivil war, in a way that leaves everyone else on the planet to suffer in our wake.

If you really want to follow me, Jesus says, if you really want to live well in authentic community with God and one another, Jesus says, "on earth as it is in heaven," you and I - like "Rocky" - will have to let this Lenten COVID wilderness conduct a full-scale lobotomy on our self-serving delusions of grandeur. And take up our cross - confronting the powers that be without fear and without vengeance - and suffer the consequences with the rest of creation.

Especially when we are "back to normal." Whatever in the world "normal" may be.

Yes, we want to *live*! I want to live. I want YOU to live.

But if COVID is going to teach us anything, let it be that salvation, liberation, wholeness, hope can only come when you and I refuse to die a little every day looking out for number one instead of God's Beloved Community on the entire earth, as it is in heaven.

If COVID is going to teach us anything, let it be that all who wander through this Lenten COVID wilderness are not entirely lost, but that we are instead finding our way again to authentic life in community with God and with one another - in this life and the next - no matter the cost.

If COVID is going to teach us anything, let it be that it IS possible to fear death no longer, even as we stay home to save lives.

For those who lose their life, Jesus says, for the sake of God's good news breaking through at the margins of society - among those who are poor and cast out - will actually save it.

And your life - and mine - given up in *this* way are worth saving!

Amen.