

Sunday, Aug. 29, 2021
St. John's Aptos

Lectionary passages poignant in our current context. Maybe not the passages I would have chosen for today, but here they are.

What jumped off the page at me:

James
Mark

None of us know the exact circumstances that led to Jane and Michael's deaths. We don't know if it involved anger or contempt or envy or any of the other "evil intentions" listed in these passages, but all of those words jumped off the page at me and made me squirm a bit.

And then there's the psalmist, whose answer to who may dwell in the tabernacle of the LORD is "whoever leads a blameless life and does what is right."

When I read that line, another psalm immediately came to mind: Psalm 130, which says in verse 2: "If you, O Lord, who were to note what is done amiss, O Lord, who could stand?"

If only these who lead a blameless life and do what is right get to dwell with the Lord, then we're all in trouble. Very few people would meet the description of the "blameless" person described in this psalm or the "righteous" as described throughout the psalms, proverbs, and other wisdom literature in the Hebrew Bible – and even those who appear "righteous" and "blameless" to others probably are not so in their innermost hearts. "If you, O Lord, who were to note what is done amiss, O Lord, who could stand?"

Psalm 130 goes on to say, "for there is forgiveness with you, therefore you shall be feared" – not as in to be scared of, but to be revered, respected. Perhaps Psalm 130 is the psalm we need to hear today, so I'll read the whole thing...

Our faith as Christians is grounded in the concept of God's grace – unmerited, undeserved, but freely given, to all of us. It is precisely because God forgives that we revere and respect God, as the psalmist says, that we stand in awe of God.

And because God forgives, we can strive for purity of heart and faith – as our readings today call us to do, with this emphasis on purity and blamelessness and being undefiled – not because we fear punishment if we do not, but because striving to purify ourselves brings us closer to God, the only truly holy and blameless and righteous one.

This is why we pray the Collect for Purity at the beginning of each worship service (Eucharist). Remind ourselves in whose presence we stand. We might be able to hide things from others, but not from God.

We may never know exactly what happened last week between Jane and Michael. Some secrets ARE hid from us, some things we will never know or have answers to in this lifetime, but we can rest assured that the God who knows all our desires and secrets, to whom our hearts are completely and utterly open, is the same god with whom there is plenteous redemption and mercy, forgiveness and steadfast love that can purify all our impurities.

Close with guided meditation.

Although nothing from outside can defile us, only what comes from within, thank God that something from outside CAN cleanse us – the love of God.