

Hope Central Church
Pentecost 4, Year C, 7/7/2019
Flourishing
The Rev. Laura Ruth Jarrett

Isaiah 66:10-14

“Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her;
rejoice with her in joy,
all you who mourn over her—
that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast;
that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious bosom.”

For thus says God:

“I will extend prosperity to her like a river,
and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall nurse and be carried on
her arm,
and dandled on her knees.

As a mother comforts her child,
so I will comfort you;
you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

“You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice; your bodies shall flourish like the grass;
and it shall be known that the hand of God is with God’s servants,
and God’s indignation is against God’s enemies.”

Luke 10:1-11, 16-17

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them
on ahead in pairs to every town and place where he himself
intended to go.

He said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but
the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to
send out laborers into the harvest. Go on your way. See, I am
sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no
purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the
road. Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this
house!’

And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your
peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to
you.

Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever
they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not
move about from house to house.

Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before

you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The dominion of God has come near to you.'

But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the dominion of God has come near.'

"Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me."

The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!"

Flourishing

flour-ish

/ˈflɔːrɪʃ/

Learn to pronounce

verb

1.

(of a person, animal, or other living organism) grow or develop in a healthy or vigorous way, especially as the result of a particularly favorable environment.

"wild plants flourish on the banks of the lake"

synonyms: grow, thrive, prosper, grow/do well, develop, burgeon, increase, multiply, proliferate

Please pray with me. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, my Rock and my Redeemer. Amen.

As a child I thought I would flourish when I got all the toys I coveted.

As a young adolescent, I thought I would flourish if the grown ups would just tell the truth about the world.

As a teenager, I thought I would flourish when I was out on my own.

As an adult, I thought I would flourish when I reached my full potential, when I got the job of my dreams - which this is.

We thought we'd flourish if we got into the right school, got the right job, made the right contributions and received the right acknowledgment. We thought we'd flourish when we met the right person, when we had kids, when the house could stay clean, when the children got out on their own.

We thought we'd flourish once we'd gotten marriage equality, when at every turn our value and visibility did not depend on our skin - when white people see us, when men see us, when cis people see us.

We thought we'd flourish when our partners knew what we needed and their needs exactly met our own. We thought we'd flourish once we stopped making mistakes, when other stopped making mistakes.

We thought we'd flourish when there were no more concentration camps in Europe and at our southern border.

We thought we'd flourish when all who needed would have. We thought we'd flourish when peace was had.

We thought we'd flourish after the Mueller investigation and report.

Some of us thought that once we had the right amount of cash in our accounts, we would flourish. Some of us have reached that goal, but we are not yet flourishing.

Some of us quit drinking but are not yet flourishing.

Some of us left families that were unkind, families that because of disease, trauma, homophobia, transphobia could not love us, but away from them, we still are not flourishing.

Some of us thought that if vigilant enough or kind enough to keep others from stealing from us, deceiving us, betraying us, we would be safe and we would flourish, but we are not and we do not.

We think we will flourish after impeachment or a next election. We think we will flourish when Ayanna Pressley and AOC are elected president and vice president. We think we will flourish when racism ends, when gender and class oppression is no more.

But I say it is too long to wait for all those things. it is time to flourish now.

In our congregation, we've been using our prophetic voices in the pulpit, in our meetings, dinners, gatherings, to encourage our white people to see how we as individuals and members of systems kill the bodies and spirits of our people of color. We've asked our men, our straight people, our cis folx hear the stories of the suffering that has been un-hearable and un-bearable. We've told the stories of what it's like to grow up poor, with wealth and health disparities' indignity and very real horror.

We've come home from the Lynching museum, the museum of civil rights, Yad Vashem undone.

We have mourned the killing of the souls of those whom we did not see or of those to whom we are related.

We have encouraged this deep dive of knowing, seeing, witnesses not for the gratuity of it, but to grow the compassion of our congregation and our capacity for the holding of complexity. We've preached and taught all this so the eyes of the blind may see again or for the first time. So that we can begin to hear our hearts beat as one, not uniform, but as one symphony of humanity.

Now that we know, it is time, beloved ones, also, to flourish.

Jesus and his family and friends lived among the economic wreckage of first century Palestine. Jesus gathered to him 70 disciples (70 is an inexact number that means a lot) He taught them the spiritual arts and practices of cure/save. He trained them, then sent them out 2 by 2 into

villages where he would follow. He taught them about their own reactivity. If you are welcomed, stay. If you are fed, eat - that is the spiritual practice of receiving hospitality. He said when you cure a person, say the dominion of God has come near you. If you are not received, shake the dust off your feet and get on with yourself.

The 70 went out and practiced offering healing and hospitality and the seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!"

This is the alchemy of flourishing: spiritual practice and the delivery of spiritual gifts on behalf of our communities.

In the Women of Hope group, we have been telling bad ass stories of other women and of ourselves - we have confronted a terrible boss on behalf of children; managed whole law practices; stayed with a friend through tough times; stood at the dying beds of friends during the AIDS crisis; talked back to false, un-whole separations in the cancer care industry - making places for unheard voices there. We left places of security, traveled alone internationally to learn and serving abroad; stood between the police and those most at risk of police violence; and simply did not die when faced with recurring violence - and not only did we not die but thrived in all the cracks of empires' closed walls and windows.

This is the magic of flourishing. We flourish when we match God's call to us to our great willingness to respond.

So I want to put a few fine points on flourishing at Hope Central and in our homes and in all our places.

First, I want to say we can't wait for the next election cycle to flourish.

This is what flourishing needs - flourishing requires spiritual practices, singing, learning, praying, planting, caring, writing, walking, rest, exercise, creating, giving and receiving hospitality, being with friends and family.

Here's what flourishing needs - flourishing requires health/wellness - taking the necessary steps to be well, to be sober and emotionally sober. Some of us have a therapist, some a spiritual director. Some of us get massages. Some of us learn that isolation is no good for us and some of us learn we need to be alone a little bit for our health. Flourishing requires boundaries, even if we have to experiment to learn our particular boundaries in particular circumstances, daring letting our yes be yes and our no be no.

Flourishing is different from achievement - at least the way "achievement" is coded by empire. Some of us have been taught that achievement is what we live our lives for. We go to the right school, volunteer at the right things, we get the right degree, the one that makes us a real professional, we get the right job, the right advancement and raises, the right acknowledgment. Some of us have achieved all of these things, but still we do not flourish.

The difference, I think between achieving and flourishing is this. Achieving is hoping that in empire's gaze, we will do what will reward us. Flourishing is this: participating the spiritual practices so that over time we begin to hear's the Divine's compelling call, the divine realms lure. These same practices allow us to notice the molecules in us that long to respond to what is deep, compassionate on behalf of ourselves and community, that makes our emotional, physical and spiritual muscles twitch, that rewards us with transcendent peace and consolation even in a cruel confusing world - all on this on behalf of our communities. Some of us have found ourselves to be flourishing in the most difficulty, uncertain, confusing circumstances, either because we were there and needed help or because what was needed was available

because we have been practicing being tuned to the compelling need and call and responded with our longing molecules.

Flourishing is available to us all - it is not available by race or class or gender or nationality or time or place. The key is to understanding our spiritual gifts to use them, and to deliver our gifts on behalf of community. If we use the authentic spiritual name of the Divine on behalf of each other so that even demons submit to us, so that our names are written in heaven, we will be allowed consolation. We will be filled with joy. We will flourish. We are and will be cared for by God who dandles us from her knee and nurtures us at her breast, as Isaiah describes.

Our flourishing has already begun. I have noticed our flourishing has not waited. I have seen and been a part of your acts of care for one another in such complicated ways across all the difference of us - daring uncertainty so to be in relationship.

I have seen us learn and grow to see the systems that shame and harm each other. I have heard us speak out and act on behalf of each other not only in church but on our jobs, in our schools, and on the playgrounds here and everywhere.

I have noticed that we are willing to relinquish our precious theory of progressive theology or politics that were forged in privileged echo chambers for messy, fleshy relationships. I have noticed that those with rank in our congregation identify with those spiritual leaders among us who have little rank or no rank whatsoever. I have noticed we are willing to tell true stories of our lives which, exposed to light reveal enough sameness to see that we have been separated falsely by our differences - and also to see where we are importantly and glorious different.

This is flourishing, beloved ones. This is a kind of not waiting until all the circumstances are perfect. This is a kind of flourishing that happens when there is a spiritual foundation and practice. This is a kind of flourishing that is noticed and needed, so compelling is flourishing.

Finally, to flourish we must practice Paul's criteria in Galatians 5. Paul writes the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These practices will help us flourish, and they will also be the outcome so that we starting here at Hope Central may flourish in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

We don't practice love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control so to be nice. Niceness is the mask of white supremacy. We practice love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control because want to flourish.

It is time for us to flourish.

Amen.