

Sermon for September 15: *Cooling the Fire of Trauma*

“Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.” Maya Angelou, poet and activist

Today’s readings begin with a description of Wisdom. For the ancient near eastern people, Wisdom was often personified as a woman, illusive and highly sought after. This person of Wisdom – later called Sophia in early Greek and then Logos in the Greek of the Gospels, equated with “the Word” who is the Christ – wisdom contains an ineffable combination of skill, knowledge, and a divine attribute connected to God. In the beginning with God. And.

Can Wisdom change and grow? Last week’s Gospel story about the Syrophoenician woman seems indicate that, yes, even Jesus’ wisdom expanded during his ministry. What about us? What about the Church? Surely, we can, as Maya Angelou so wisely observed, know better and do better over time? Surely that is part of the human experience in each life, every generation, all eras.

As we celebrate the Season of Creation this month, we might think of all we have learned about global warming over the decades. And yet, as we face this looming, existential crisis, we often feel overwhelmed, defeated, and powerless, don’t we? As one who has studied and experienced the nature and effects of trauma, I can tell you that this kind of powerlessness causes a *trauma response*.

In the periodical *Ecopsychology*, Zhiwa Woodbury, from the Department of East-West Psychology, at the California Institute of Integral Studies, observes: *“When viewed honestly through the lens of traumatology, this deepening existential crisis presents an entirely new, unprecedented, and higher-order category of trauma: Climate Trauma. What is unique about this category of trauma is that it is an ever-present, ever-growing threat to the biosphere, one that calls into question our shared identity . . . Climate Trauma is continually triggering all past traumas—personal, cultural, and intergenerational—and will continue to do so until such time as it is acknowledged. Climate Trauma provides the missing narrative explaining our dissociated unresponsiveness to the climate crisis, and suggests an alternative approach to effecting the kind of fundamental societal change needed”*

What did you do this weekend? *I went away to study trauma!* Through an effective method called “Lifespan Integration Therapy”, people harmed by traumas at any stage of life can process and move forward from those experiences. By using timelines of memories, and infusing them with imagination and third person wisdom, even traumatic memories can be changed forever. Stories – even the stories of our church, community, world – can help us to acknowledge our strengths and resources and remember that God helped us to survive. I think of the litanies we recite together, or the stories we tell around the Eucharistic table, and how they could be part of a healing journey for us as individuals and community.

And, can you guess what emotion nearly always comes up around trauma? *Shame*.

In our story today from the Gospel according to Mark, Simon Peter sees Jesus' prediction of suffering and trauma as something shameful. And Jesus claps back, with the familiar "Get behind me Satan" (my drag queen friends would say "not today, Satan!"). Jesus says: no, Peter. Suffering is nothing to be ashamed of.

Jesus' suffering was caused by Empire, by oppression, not by weakness. And yet, even in the Church, as well as in addressing the climate crisis, we often remain dissociated, in denial about the real harm having been and being done to ourselves and others. We allow the "Satan" of shame to keep us quiet, to keep us stuck. I don't think we're called to seek suffering, nor are we called to deny it.

In the country from which I hail, people not only *deny* fundamental harms done to their fellow creatures, but they also turn away from the wisdom needed to heal it. I can hear Wisdom calling out (perhaps at the recent Presidential debate) "How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge?" How long is right! We're burning time.

Part of our work as Anglican Christians, as those who *respect the dignity of every human, and safeguard the integrity of creation*, who say "get behind us Satan!" is to cast off our own denial and ignorance whenever we can. To lean into the courage needed to learn better and do better; to heal our own and others' traumas.

Here at St. Bart's we are daring to do better with our communications. Making a commitment to taming our speech -- something that the letter to James show us challenged many early churches-- and to instead become aware of our own fears and doubts and heal our own traumas. Together. Without shame. With Love.

Today I suggest to you that post-modern, post-colonial psychology does not *compete* with Christian thought, it *compliments* it on a practical level, the same way that other sciences -- like the ecology and economics we discussed last week -- help us to better understand God's creation and to seek justice in God's world.

Together, in this safe and loving community, we can practice healthy boundaries, self-compassion, and secure attachments. We can, as Dr. Daniel Siegel suggests, become more Flexible, Adaptive, Cohesive, Energized and Stable -- a place of healing and health. By seeking Wisdom, and "knowing better", we can better continue to co-create with God a world with greater compassion and empathy, rather than fear and division. Sound good? I have faith in God and in us!

Let us pray: *"May the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our strength and our redeemer"*.

And all God's followers said together, AMEN!