

In last week's reading Jesus was leaving Jericho heading up to Jerusalem. If we were reading strictly in order this week would be chapter 11, where Jesus enters Jerusalem, but we have three weeks until Palm Sunday, so we are going to jump ahead in our readings into Jesus week in Jerusalem and on Palm Sunday we'll read the Palm Sunday story. This shifting of readings happens mainly because a third of the Gospel of Mark is about last week of Jesus earthly life.

Mark 12

The "they" and "them" in this reading are the elders, scribes, chief priest and in the next reading Jesus confronts the Pharisees and Sadducees. They are the elites of Jewish society and it is Jesus' conflict with them that will get him handed over to the Romans, who kill him. But this parable isn't an anti-Jewish story or even just about the Jewish elites. We want to read the parable and say it must be *them, those people* really have it coming to them. But what if this parable is for us? I am a tenant, I have a relationship with the landowner and I can reap the benefits of all the owner has done. God's actions toward us are repeatedly gracious. And we are all uncooperative—not wanting to hear Jesus message, not wanting the world to change, not wanting the meek to inherit the earth or the blind beggar to receive sight if it gets in the way of our comfort. I often misuse- or even take for granted- the gifts God has given me: natural resources, my money, health, time. Jesus is speaking to us.

The story intensifies, the beloved Son is killed and the tenants put themselves in the place of owner to inherit; a

position of power and status. Then the pattern of destruction comes full-circle; the destroyers are destroyed—experience what they have inflicted—and this is the most disturbing part of the story. Could this ever happen? Is it possible that God could ever get tired? Could God ever get sick and tired of our sinfulness? If our answer is based on this one parable then the answer is "yes" but we need to ask another question, "What does this parable *do*?" "How does it function?"

Remember on the Muppets, how Gonzo was always getting shot out of a cannon. What Jesus is doing here is tracing the trajectory of this story, not where Gonzo is going to land, but where will this story land if we let it play out, if it goes off. Jesus is saying—we are here and this is where the pattern leads. The parable allows us to wake up and say, "Oh my, I need to change, I now see where this dysfunction leads, no more. I need to change: life, community, relationship."

This parable is a summons to change; *an invitation to the good life, God wants for us*. The research Brene Brown has done around shame and vulnerability is a parable, of sorts, giving us a picture of wholehearted living that we recognize as life with Christ. Like Jesus' parables involve worldly examples that don't name God, Brene's book doesn't name God, but God is there, she paints a picture of the loving world Jesus seeks to bring about. As Christians the words "You are enough" are first and foremost the words of our loving God to all of creation and to us specifically as individuals. In our baptisms God names and claims us and makes holy the strengths that God created within us. You are enough is another

phrasing of the words that Jesus heard at his baptism, "You are my child, you bring me joy."

Brene's book shows us the trajectory of our current living. Last week we talked about the cultural norms to which men and women are held. For women: be nice, thin, and modest and use all available means for appearance. For men: control emotions, work is first, pursue status and violence. We talked about shame being the fear of disconnection and how those cultural norms are the root of shame in our lives. In this week's reading, Chapter four, looks at the armor we put on to defend against shame and how that armor gets in the way of our vulnerability, being truly the people God made us to be.

As Brene embarked on her research about the armors we use she assumed that each different armor would require a different strategy to get us to put it down, but that isn't what emerged from the data. It turns out that believing that we're "enough" is the way out of the armor—believing we are "enough" gives us permission to take off the mask.

I'm going to talk about just one of the masks or armor we use. Anxiety about joy or foreboding joy is when we lose the ability to be vulnerable, joy becomes something we approach with deep anxiety. We would all say we crave more joy in our lives, because in this culture that proclaims deep scarcity—never feeling safe, certain or sure enough—joy can feel like a setup. I can wake up in the morning and say, "work is going well, the family is healthy, the house is still standing, I'm working out and feeling good... this is bad. This is really bad, some disaster must be lurking around the corner." When Brene

started asking people about the experiences the left them feeling most vulnerable she heard, "Standing over my children while they're sleeping, Acknowledging how much I love my husband/wife, knowing how good I've got it, loving my job." Softening into the joyful moments of our lives requires vulnerability. When we spend our lives pushing away vulnerability we don't have room for the uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure of joy. Believing we are "enough" is the way to let down the foreboding joy armor. One of the practices that helps us lean into the vulnerability of joy is to acknowledge how truly grateful we are for the person, the beauty, the connection or the moment before us. I know quite a few people who have turned this into a spiritual practice; using a gratitude journal or writing a note once a week to someone for whom they are grateful. Joy is a spiritual way of connecting with the world.

DG p126-27 "picture memories"

This is a parable—the Kingdom of God is like a little girl that fills her soul with joy and shines bringing light to the world. Gratitude is the path to joy—the life God seeks for us. I pray this fills you with gratitude: You are one of God's picture memories. God is grateful for you. You bring God deep joy. Amen.