Sermon – November 10, 2024 – "The Post-Election Sermon ("maje, desahógate")" by Rev. Dale Carl Fredrickson

It's never easy to find the right words. But speaking the right words as a pastor on a Sunday morning after yet another divisive American Presidential election to a deeply divided America seems impossible to me. Did I also tell you that we're in the middle of a stewardship campaign called "Home?"

What a sermon can't do is offer incisive political analysis, a historical survey of Republican versus Democratic triumphs, failures, and trends, or even predict what will happen in the future.

What a sermon can do is offer some words of faith, hope, and love. What a sermon can do is "point" imperfectly to the God whose love is embodied through the person of Jesus. A sermon can remind you of how vitally important it is to be a person of faith, hope, and love in a world that often devalues, misunderstands, or completely misrepresents Christianity.

This week, I have written and rewritten, and I have been filled with tears, frustration, peace, and joy. This morning, I have a simple offering: a poem, some beautiful scriptures, and some good news. First, a poem by Benjamin Gucciardi, "The Rungs," from a book called *West Portal.*

> Only the person with the green dice should be talking,
> I remind the boys, holding up the oversized foam cubes.
>
> And the others should be? Listening, K. says,
> and how should we listen? *Con el corazón*, M. replies,
>
> thumping his chest with his closed fist.
> That's right, I say, with the heart. Who wants to start?
>
> The dice are passed around the circle
> and the boys gloss over the check-in question.
>
> When they reach B., who walked here, unaccompanied,
> from Honduras three months ago, he holds them like boulders.
>
> We straighten when his lip begins to quiver.
> It's not my place to tell you what he shared that day.
>
> But I can tell you how M. put his hand on B.'s back
> and said, *maje*, *desahógate,*
>
> which translates roughly to un-drown yourself,
> though no English phrase so willingly accepts
>
> that everyone has drowned, and that we can reverse that gasping,
> expel the fluids from our lungs.

I sit quietly as the boys make, with their bodies, the rungs of a ladder,
and B. climbs up from the current, sits in the sun

for a few good minutes before he jumps back in.
The dice finish the round and we are well over time.

I resist the urge to speak about rafts, what it means to float.
Good, I tell them, let's go back to class.

After handshakes and side hugs, I'm left alone in the small room
with a box of unopened tissues, two starburst wrappers on the ground.

I love this simple poem about a group of boys participating in a class activity with the school counselor. It captures the tenderness of these boys learning to listen with their hearts (*Con el corazón*). And then, the poem moves to the student named "B" who walked here from Honduras. Another student, "M," puts his hand on "B"'s back and says (maje, desahógate,) which translates to "un-drown yourself."

In one interpretation, the poem suggests that through "empathy," we become ladders for one another and help each other "un-drown ourselves" from whatever wounds, traumas, and losses have sunk us. We may or may not have walked her from Honduras, but each of us has a journey of how we got here. With its beautiful image, this poem reminds me of today's scripture.

16 *He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read,* ***17*** *and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:*

18 *"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,*
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
19 *to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*[a]

20 *Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him.* ***21*** *He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."*

What is clear from this scene in the Gospels is that Jesus' life and ministry are about freedom. Can we say this morning that Jesus came to tell us and to the world just like in the poem "Un-drown Yourself?" (But I'm getting ahead of myself; maje, desahógate). There's a background to this profound passage. It comes in Isaiah chapter 61:1-4. Jesus is quoting from this passage that he has memorized and embodied from his childhood.

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,
2 *to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor*
and the day of vengeance of our God,
to comfort all who mourn,
3 *and provide for those who grieve in Zion—*
to bestow on them a crown of beauty
instead of ashes,
the oil of joy
instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise
instead of a spirit of despair.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
a planting of the Lord
for the display of his splendor.
4 *They will rebuild the ancient ruins*
and restore the places long devastated;
they will renew the ruined cities
that have been devastated for generations.

Now, we can see how Jesus is bringing this ancient passage from Isaiah to life. Jesus has come to preach good news to the poor, the brokenhearted, and prisoners. This passage teaches that God is for the least, the last, and the lost. The passage builds on the Gospel's storyline, reminding us that Jesus embodies the awe-inspiring themes of Jubilee, Liberation, Shalom, Shema, and Kingdom (Kin-dom). Jesus profoundly struggles for our freedom. The "Freedom Struggle" is central to the Christian faith. The passage pulses with energy, reminding us to be the people of freedom. Be the people who un-drown people through your justice lifestyle. This is why, in his most excellent sermon, Jesus challenges us to be "Peacemakers" and "Justice Seekers." (Matthew 5:6 & 9) This is why Jeremiah in 29:7 said: But seek the welfare (Shalom) of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare (Shalom) you will find your welfare (Shalom). James, who struggled against the dehumanizing campaigns of King Herod, said it this way: "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." (1:27)

In the Gospel story, Jesus' friends and family from the synagogue are upset or perplexed at his words. It uses the strong word "offense." They took "offense" at Jesus' words. Why are the people so upset? Because they expected a "nice" and "easy" sermon, but Jesus challenged them to be part of a movement. Some days, like today, we need a bigger storyline when an election goes or doesn't go the way we hoped. We need to remember the heart of the Christian Faith. This beautiful poem and these scriptures with the words maje, desahógate get us close, don't they? This passage reminds us that Jesus invites us to the freedom movement. Isaiah's poetic language captures this well: we "comfort" those mourning, place upon them a "crown of beauty" for their "ashes," "oil of joy" instead of

“mourning,” “a garment of praise” instead of “despair.” We remind people that they are “oaks of righteousness” planted by the lord to be “splendorous.” We remind people that no matter where they came from or what they’ve been through, they are “home” at Christ UMC. Benjamin Gucciardi’s poem says it this way:

> “But I can tell you how M. put his hand on B.’s back
> and said, *maje*, *desahógate,*
>
> which translates roughly to un-drown yourself,
> though no English phrase so willingly accepts
>
> that everyone has drowned, and that we can reverse that gasping,
> expel the fluids from our lungs.”

Lastly, I have promised some good news. For many of us, this has been a difficult week with uncertain days ahead. However, this morning, the good news is that God is inviting Christ UMC is to help each other and our community to “un-drown” themselves. The call is: *maje*, *desahógate,* Our freedom mission matters! We are part of the Gospel struggle. Elections are important, but we are engaged in much more than just elections. Here’s what we are about:

We imperfectly follow Jesus and advocate for women and their rights.
We stand with our LGBTQ siblings.
We support those facing all forms of racial discrimination.
We stand with immigrants and the undocumented.
We support everyone struggling for life: single moms, overworked dads, teenagers, young adults, Ukrainians, and Palestinians.

Jesus invites us to remember the freedom struggle.

The days ahead will not be easy; they never are. But we are not alone.

–Dale Carl Fredrickson