

Rev. Micah Nutter Dowling preaching from Mathew 13:31-33, 44-52 Romans 8:26-39

“When it All Falls Apart, Love Wins”

Confessions and Creeds are part of our Church past and present. They are a part of Church history and part of church ritual, in the Presbyterian Church. They are a daily Sunday proclamation to what we believe. This proclamation is a testimony to what we believe even when we struggle; many written from a place of struggle and great wrestling.

However, as they have become pointed and rehearsed, they lose some of their vulnerability, questions and doubts. This often causes Confirmation Students to apologize when their confessions of faith are not confident enough, or not stuffed with victorious stories of triumph over evil and winning faith moments added to paper like poets.

You see, we have unfortunately and unknowingly communicated that confusion, pain, uncertainty, and yes, doubt are not part of our Christian story,

But our text today points toward weakness, hardship and distress. And if our current crises are any indication, our confession today must include these things as part of our story. A man once left a church citing that it was all about rules and rule-followers. His father begged him to return to church and one day he did. Upon entering worship, the congregation was reading the prayer of confession admitting sins of things left undone and sins, which they had done. The church confessed it was not healthy. His response: This is my kind of crowd!

In fact, Our Scripture today is for precisely when it all falls apart! Often, these Scriptures have falsely been used to justify an easy path for Christians, but what is here is a God present in our suffering. If things are a mess for you right now, this is your Sunday, because this is a passage for those in their worst moments.

However, it is easier to view suffering as a place where God is absent than a place where God is present. Nevertheless, that is our assurance this morning! Creation groans, there is an active force redreaming us all - The plural pronouns confirm that this is not just a cliché: We are all in this together! God is working and present in the mess, the doubts, the questions, the very moment you throw up your hands!

Is this not a text for us all right now?

-Parents are being asked to work full-time jobs on both ends right now AND educate their children.

-Home-band cry through glass-plated doors to see their family, some have no family.

-People debate the politics of Covid-19, while there is real death and suffering around us.

-In the midst of Covid-19, there is racism-1619 rampant in our systems, victimizing folks of color.

Does the Bible speak to when it all falls apart?

Is there hope in this mess? What is our story now? What is the faith we are to celebrate today?

The Gospel reading reminds us that those "mustard seeds" can be very well hidden, like treasure in a field. I see that treasure in our confirmation students I have had the pleasure to listen to. It is all around us. Yes, even in this mess. The voice of God, whispering in our ear, pushing us beyond our boundaries, speaking timeless truths in new ways, abundance from the smallest, unexpected sources: LOVE WINS. This is also a powerful book by Rob Bell pointing us to this very truth. I would encourage for your reading, "Love Wins".

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? We are more than conquerors through him who loved us. If everything is falling apart, you are just in time. A new generation is teaching us that LOVE WINS! They are writing it on the sidewalk and splashing art on outdated symbols. They are re-imagining how we can find our way back to God's communal promise that God's love never stops, never quits and never fails. Even as we embody a God who did suffer, LOVE WINS. Amen.