

It's been quite intimidating to write something titled "Wisdom from the Woods" - for I write to you, St. Peter's - my beloved church community - full of questions and wonder...

I couldn't shake the feeling that maybe I should write about community or relationships - but oh, the complexities! How and why do we find ourselves drawn in union to certain people? And how and why is it that some people find themselves outside of these unions? I am NO expert. But like many of you, I do have decades of experience in seeking out and being a part of community; in neighborhoods, schools, work and churches. And in those communities, I have developed my most lasting and treasured relationships. As adults, it seems to me that what brings us to certain communities is a common interest; and our relationships form as a result of our human need to belong, to be known and to be loved.

Right now, our St. Peter's in the Woods community can't meet in person. And I want you to know, I miss you. I miss hugs, passing the peace, singing with you and the intimacy and opportunity of looking in your eyes as I serve as a Lay Eucharistic Minister. Those things just can't be replaced by Zoom meetings or online worship; however grateful I am for them. Even as I grieve those connections with you and the greater loss we all face during this pandemic, it occurs to me that we have been given an opportunity to reimagine how we might connect and form community and relationships. Now, in this time, when we can ONLY connect with those outside of our homes through technology, we find the whole world at our fingertips. We have access to the knowledge and stories of people's lived experiences we might not ever have known otherwise.

Our online worship is beautiful and life giving; and I have always been so proud of how our church acts as God's hands and feet - generously completing any task we need to to help those in need. But how do we as individuals, physically forced apart from our church, continue to be The living Church in our hurting world?

I wonder about the big picture? And I mean - the REALLY big picture. What about this whole human community in which we find ourselves? How do we imagine our connectedness? Is God the center of this great community? Or have we centered ourselves?

I wonder how our lived experiences affect our ability or even our willingness to hear and understand the experiences of others? Are we only able to view other's experiences through the lens of our own lived experiences? Can we even *believe* what people tell us is true, if their experiences are so very different from our own?

"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8).

When I recently came across this verse from Micah, I had been feeling ashamed that I was so woefully unaware of the unjust systems stacked against people of color in our society. I knew though, admittedly from experience, that if I stayed in that place of shame, I'd be paralyzed and continue in privileged complacency. So, I have been seeking out the stories of the lives people of color live in our nation. I've been meeting with people from our church to discuss the book, "Waking Up White" and I've been researching the very roots of how and why we come to be at this time of great unrest in our nation. But this verse... It so moved and inspired me! I do want justice for all - I do love kindness - but without humbleness (defined - having or showing a modest or low estimate of one's own importance) what would my walk with God look like? Sound like? Would I drown out the cares of God for his whole family thinking only of my own? How then would I be moved into action for others? In this verse, Micah reminds us that we are called to "walk humbly WITH God". If I daily acknowledge God with me - walking right next to me on this journey, how can I only think of my truths? My heart breaks open to know that God, the creator of us all, has children who are trembling in their very skin and crying in our streets... What then, God, are you calling us no to do?

I wonder if God is using this unique time in history to call us into communion through compassion? Could God be calling us to listen so that we might understand - so that our hearts might soften to know - not only the hurt that exists in our world - but also the joy we can find in these new communions and in the seeking of justice for all? For how can we truly love our neighbors if we don't actively seek to love them, know them and affirm the belonging they received in being created in the image of God?

Lord, how might we humbly extend your loving welcome and seek justice for your whole human family? Father Thomas Keating offers this prayer...

Welcome, welcome, welcome.
I welcome everything that comes to me today
because I know it's for my healing.
I welcome all thoughts, feelings, emotions, persons,
situations, and conditions.
I let go of my desire for power and control.
I let go of my desire for affection, esteem,
approval and pleasure.
I let go of my desire for survival and security.
I let go of my desire to change any situation,
condition, person or myself.
I open to the love and presence of God and
God's action within. Amen.

I am so grateful to be walking on this journey with God and you, people of St. Peter's in the Woods!