

“Vulnerability sounds like truth and feels like courage. Truth and courage aren’t always comfortable, but they’re never weakness.”

That is one of the many quotes that I appreciate from Brene Brown and her wisdom when it comes to vulnerability.

Late last night, I headed to the church to write my sermon. It had been a very long week and I had wrestled with the scriptures and with the weeks happenings and much was swirling in my head but nothing had gone from my head and through my fingertips to the keyboard to be able to land on the paper. In addition to the scriptures and happenings during the week, today, we have Memorial Day display, graduate’s recognition, healing service and Ascension Day was on Thursday which can be pushed to today, it’s a lot.

Anyways, when I arrived at the church, I checked the altar to make sure the service was set with the bulletins and announcements before making my way to my office. I am glad that I did. There was a present for me on the altar.

The present was this card. It says, “Get out of Jail”

With this sermon, I may need the card.

In reality, the card represents the first reading for today. When I sat down with the worship team last month, I shared with them that I was going to preach from the first reading and Paul and Silas, once again, find themselves in prison.

I started this morning message off with the vulnerability quote because I want to be a little vulnerable today and share with you about my week and about the scriptures and the reason that I struggled with putting this sermon together.

On Monday, I started the week sitting by my wife’s side as she was doing 3+ hours of infusion treatment for her Crohn’s disease. While I sat there with her, I read the scriptures and some commentaries and I was hit really hard with this thought from Andrew Foster Collins:

Congregations need to be challenged to spend less time managing internal structures and more time wielding gospel power in the world.

So, I tried to reflect on my last fifteen months here at Bay View and wondered how many hours I and the church have invested in managing internal structures. I kind of cringed hard and said, a lot of time and energy has been placed into that bucket. Then I sat back and tried to think how much time and energy has been used to wield the power of the gospel in our community. I gulped and went not much. With that, I decided to focus on other aspects of ministry life.

On Tuesday, I gathered with four other members of Bay View and we met with a stewardship coach and began to wrestle with some tough questions as they relate to the finances of Bay View. As the meeting was wrapping up, I heard the Breaking News of the tragedy in Texas and my heart broke. I spend the evening with the Learning Board and we talked ministry and Texas with deep sighs.

As I settled into the day of Wednesday, we heard the news that Carl had passed during the night and I met with the family in the afternoon. His funeral will be here in this space on Friday at 11. Then in the evening, we had confirmation, the last one. I could not believe that we have finished this year.

The class brought me back to the first reading though. In confirmation, we were talking about Paul and his rollercoaster life and the word that we explored at great length for 3 weeks was resilience.

I am not sure, but I think that each and everyone of us could use a little more resilience. The first step in learning how to develop resilience is developing hope. We spent considerable amount of time in our Thursday afternoon bible study talking about hope as it pertained to our Revelation passage.

Speaking about Thursday, I was somewhat at a loss with Tuesday's tragedy. I had heard about a colleague in Ohio doing a chair display, so I decided to put out chairs in the church lawn. I was amazed how much attention it received with individuals stopping and taking pictures and individuals sharing our post. Our top posts will normally receive 100 views, but the chairs had 30 shares and over 4,000 views. Maybe that was a small example of wielding the gospel power.

Then, we also provided a self-guided worship service and rang the bells at noon, trying to throw out some light in the darkness.

On Friday and Saturday, I made another epic road trip and I thought, this is where the sermon will be brewed. Early in the trip, something occurred. A vehicle passed me on IA 151 which is a four-lane road with a median and cross traffic. The car got back in front of me in the right lane. Minutes later, even though we were traveling 65-70 mph, everything seemed to be put in slow motion.

From the left, I could see a car and camper-trailer go across the left lanes, into the median and then proceeded across the right-hand lanes. My thoughts went from the following:

- There's no way they are going to attempt
- They are attempting
- There is no way they are going to make it
- There is no way the car will stop
- Crash
- T-Bone

I quickly pulled off the road and ran to the SUV in front of me and pulled mom and 11-year-old out. Thankfully, they did not really need assistance; their car and curtain airbags, saved their lives. I remained with them for about 30 minutes and then continued the 7-hour drive but sermonizing did not occur. I just kept replaying the accident.

Then, when I got down to Missouri with Isaiah, I saw that I had notifications regarding the ELCA decision. Many of you may not know, but there has been a lot of hurt in the Sierra Pacific Synod. Bishop Eaton rendered her decision and there seems to be no one who is really happy with the decision.

The decisions effect persons of color and the LGBT community and many individuals, including my colleagues do not feel safe to speak to the issues at hand and my heart hurts for them, as well as for the community in Texas.

There is so much pain and hurt and many times we remain silent.

That then took me back to Wednesday when I was in a public space and a group was loudly speaking about how we should not welcome 100,000 Ukraine's and then they shifted to the events of Tuesday and I could not disagree with them more. What did I do? I bit my lip really hard. I should have not done it, but I was worried and scared what individuals might think.

So, I drove back to Wisconsin yesterday and all of these events were swirling in my head. The image that kept coming to my mind was Paul and Silas. Sitting in jail.

Paul and Silas actions were probably imperfect. Yet, those actions propelled them to a perfect ending. The jailor and household, I am sure were forever grateful. The jailer did not hear the good news of Jesus Christ from a pew. He heard it from brave disciples.

The good news is not really preached from me here, but it is preached by all of us when we are on the go. I have had individuals engage in conversation with me about a strategy for church growth. We want the pews filled PJ, what can we do?

It is NOT going to happen with a cute program or strategy. Instead, it will occur as a natural outcome when we are fearless in the proclamation of the Gospel.

The church is in the process of doing a ministry review of me. If you have not filled it out yet, I want to encourage you to do so today and drop it in the safe. But, as I take inventory, I wonder if Andrew is right when he switched from church to church leader.

What percentage of my time is spent maintaining internal structures versus the percentage of time getting in trouble with the gospel. Maybe if I did the latter, the congregation would rediscover the joy of our evangelical faith.

In closing, I want to go back to Paul and Silas and hit it from a different angle. The slave owners attacked them by manipulating ethnic and religious prejudices.

This is how the world operates. I will let you choose the “power interest” but those in power often find ways to silence the voices on the bottom rung of society and often those are the individuals most effected by economic injustices.

I want you to please mark on your calendar June 2-4 and pray for the Sierra Pacific Synod. That is when they will be having their Synod Assembly and it has the potential to be very painful.

Colleagues voices are being silenced.

Colleagues have fear.

Fear is a main tool of power.

Division between minority groups are being used to distract them from recognizing that they do have a common connection (God) and for the common good (the ministry of the Gospel).

Let me close with this Good News:

When death no longer holds sway over our actions, disciples are free to confront and challenge powers opposed to God.

We see in the prison that confrontation lead to conversion.

The church needs to engage the world more deeply. May our fear prisons crumble. Let's be bold. **AMEN.**

Let us unite our hearts in prayer

and entrust to the hands of the Lord

those who will be graduated tomorrow.

May God who began this good work in you

carry it through to completion,

enabling you to use your talents to the fullest.

May God give you the grace to make wise choices

and to be faithful to your commitments,

always confident in the support of those who love you.

May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers,

half-truths, and superficial relationships,

so that you will live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger at injustice,

oppression, and exploitation of people,

so that you will work for justice, equality, and peace.

May God bless you with tears to shed for those who

suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, and war,

so that you will reach out your hand

to comfort them and change their pain into joy.

May God bless you with the foolishness to think

that you can make a difference in the world,

so that you will do the things

which others tell you cannot be done.

May your integrity be a gift to the world

and may the Spirit of God be with you always. Amen