

Jeremiah 20:7-13

Matthew 10:24-39

Romans 6:1b-11

“In your great mercy, O God,
answer with your unfailing help.” AMEN!

“Oh, I can’t keep it in.
I can’t keep it in, I’ve gotta let it out.

I’ve gotta show the world, world’s gotta see.
See all the love, love that’s in me.

I said, why walk alone?

Why worry when it’s warm over here?
You’ve got so much to say, say what you mean.

Mean what you’re thinking and think anything...
Oh why?”

Ok, I have to stop here!

One of my favorite songs from
one of my favorite artists, Cat Stevens,
also known as, Yusuf Islam.

Funny story from seminary there’s a class called
“Wedding and Funeral Proclamation.”

Yes, you heard it correctly. :-)

This preaching class gave us some insight and offered to us practice for the times during ordained ministry when we are called

to preach the gospel in moments of celebration (weddings) and during times of intense grief (funerals).

We were given the assignment to prepare a service and write and deliver a sermon to the class.

The student could choose either a fictitious person's death or a person we knew who died.

I chose the latter of the two.

My real life experience was the death of one of my classmates in high school.

She died in a tragic, single car crash on a road she drove everyday.

The accident occurred while she was on her way to graduation rehearsal.

Stacey would have sat next to me and her best girl friend for the graduation ceremony.

Stacey and I were friends and had even dated earlier in our junior but had broken up in the summer before senior year.

Anyway, the part I want to share with you has to do with Cat Stevens and the song we sang at the beginning of the sermon.

Stacey was the one who introduced me to Cat Steven's music.

I loved it right away.

And as a tribute to that memory and to her, I wanted to mention that in my sermon to the class at seminary.

But I was young and dumb, even in seminary! :-)

If you think my sermons suffer now, you should hear some of the one's I preached back then! :-)

Anyway, to my defense, it *was* a class to practice preaching, right?

So I belted out the "I can't keep it in," part of the song during the portion of

the sermon where we were to share
the good news of hope,

Hope in a time of sadness, for the resurrection
given to us from Jesus.

It was a powerful moment in preaching...
but only for me! :-) Right?

I had the connection of the song (and with Stacey)
but to others it didn't really mean much.

Thankfully, the professor remarked that
what happened was Tom's way of dealing with
the tragedy of a friend who died too young.
(Pause)

So, "we can't keep it in." Right?
We've gotta let it out.

Like in our gospel, Jesus can't keep in what
he needs to say to those of his followers
willing to stay with him.

Today's text follows on the heels of
last week's difficult words about division and,
now, in this is part of the speech -

Jesus gave a lesson that told that

no human relationship must be allowed
to come between the follower and
Christ Jesus.

Not even parent-child relationships...

We must acknowledge the
desperation that this Jesus spoke.

And in it ask ourselves the question,
“Why do we hold onto this faith?”

I mean if we believe the statistics
about people who are exiting the church
faster than someone like me
exits the polar bear club! :-)

Why do we still come to church
and hold onto this faith?

The non-affiliated to church “crowd”
is growing and (honestly)

North American Christianity is being defined
as an organization that looks, more and more,
like an unforgiving and judgmental group
of ne'er do wells from those outside
a church family. (Pause)

So, what keeps us holding onto this faith? (Pause)

One Sunday morning, the pastor noticed little Alex standing in the foyer (narthex) of the church and he was staring up at a large plaque.

On it were names and next to the names small American flags.

The six year old was standing there for a long time, so the pastor walked up and stood beside the child and quietly said,

“Good morning, Alex.”

“Hi, Pastor.” The boy replied not taking his eyes off the plaque.

“Pastor, what is this?”

The pastor replied, “Well, that is a memorial to all the young men and women who died in the service.”

Soberly, they stood next to each other, staring at the large plaque.

Finally, the child broke the silence and

with a barely audible voice,
that trembled with fear, asked,

"Which service, the 8:00 or the 10:30?" (Pause)

So, another side note.

Billie Reardon texted that story to me
at the very moment when I wrote
that last question:

What is it that keeps us holding onto this faith? :-)

A God wink.

A God reminder.

A God moment.

A coincidence, that tells us that
the world's chaos is known and one of the things
God offers is an allowance to laugh.

That holds us to this faith.

The insight that Jesus, in this text today,
recognized the desperation of people but
needed to say he did not come
to bring political rebellion against Rome.

He did not come to settle the individual

struggles people had with one another.

This is, in fact, this is God in human form on earth
but not meant to usher in messianic peace
between parents and children.

His work was much deeper and much broader.

These, beloved, are tastes of what keeps us
holding onto this faith.

That even in our American struggles with division -
political, economic, social, racial, ethnic,
and gender, where some families cannot
even share time together at a table
during Thanksgiving and Christmas.

That even, as families breakdown, and
our community fabric bursts at the seams.

Jesus called people first to establish
a relationship with Him, to be real and laugh.

Without this deep relationship with Christ, or
with God's Spirit, or with
the Architect of the Cosmos,

whatever one wishes to call this Higher Power -
without it, we will always pit one

against the other, and be afraid, and
we will always count the things we don't have
and envy the things that others have,
while closing ourselves up more and more.

Yet, this faith-
the faith professed here, however imperfectly. :-)

The faith of everyone in this room and
the faith of those listening and watching online,
although imperfectly acted on...

still bends toward kindness to strangers...
leans into duty and responsibility to others...

steps toward fair and just treatment
for all God's children...

breathes in healthy concerns for the environment...

and stands up for progressive acceptance
and understandings around issues of
human inclusivity.

God is love, is love, is love...

And there's one other thing I should say.

Beloved, you (all) are why I hold onto this faith.

We can't keep it in.

Why walk alone and why worry.

We are united in this together!

AMEN!