

Resistance as Being Present

I talked last week during our sharing of joys and concerns about a revival that has broken out at my Alma Mater, Asbury College, now known as Asbury University. It began February 8 and it is still going, attracting more and more people. So many people have now come to the small campus that they can't all fit in the auditorium.

What began as a 10:00 am chapel service has now gone on for days. There have been people continuously praying and singing inside Hughes Auditorium, coming in and out at all hours of day and night. Word has spread throughout the Christian community and drawn quite a crowd from far beyond Central Kentucky.

People said they had driven from as far as Chicago. One of my friends that I graduated with came up from Georgia. Administrators said they had heard from people as far as Pennsylvania and New Jersey. In a town of 6,000 people, you can definitely feel it when a crowd shows up.

Leonard Fitch who owns the only grocery store in town, Fitch's IGA in Wilmore, said he has noticed a lot more out of state vehicles in his parking lot. He said "I hope it continues and I hope it has worldwide outreach to a lot of people. They'll come and carry the spirit back with them."

So many people have come that Hughes Auditorium can't hold them all. Overflow crowds are watching a live stream in Estes Chapel and McKenna Chapel across the street at the seminary.

One student said, "We're hungry. We want healing. We want restoration for people. You see people are broken and hurting everywhere and we believe that the Lord is the answer to bring healing and freedom."

More than anything else, some of these people said, they just want to feel togetherness.

I had some amazing spiritual highs at Hughes Auditorium at Asbury College. In fact, it was there in 1980, when I looked at the pipe organ at the front of the chapel and read the words "Holiness Unto the Lord", that I finally answered my call into ordained ministry.

I have gone back to Hughes Auditorium when I have felt lost, and needed to feel God again.

I'm not sure if you have a place like that where you go to be re-energized in your faith, but for a long time, Hughes Auditorium was my holy place. I would be lying to you if I said that I haven't thought about heading down to Asbury myself to be in the midst of what some are calling a revival.

Have you ever needed a re-charge? I know I have. Sometimes I've just had enough. Sometimes, I need to get away from it all, turn off the TV with all of its awful news, turn off my computer, turn off my phone, retreat, close the door and put up a "do not disturb" sign, hike a trail in some remote area, take a break. Sometimes, I can't deal with the people I dearly love.

Sometimes I need a space or a time of sanctuary, a space or time when I can just breathe, pray, recharge my physical, emotional, spiritual battery.

Have you ever felt that way? I think it's only natural that we need these spaces and times of sanctuary. There is so much going on in our lives, we have to deal with so many different things on a day to day basis. We are overwhelmed by so many issues around us and in the world. We experience sensory overload each and every day. Sometimes we seem to give and give and give, be it care or help or

attention, until we feel depleted. Then it's time to push the reset button. "Put on your oxygen mask before assisting others" – there is some wisdom in that/

When we come to our scripture today, Jesus is trying to get his disciples to understand that he was going to have to undergo great suffering at the hands of the chief priests and scribes and be killed. And he tells his disciples that if they want to be his followers, they must deny themselves and take up their own crosses.

After six days, which the disciples have likely spent trying to figure a way out of this whole mess, Jesus takes three of his most trusted disciples up a mountain.

This may have proven to be a source of great relief to the disciples, especially Peter. Maybe, Peter thinks, Jesus has finally come to his senses and is going to tell them how he plans to work around this whole suffering and death thing.

Maybe Jesus will even apologize to Peter for calling him Satan and telling Peter to get behind him. But that's not what happens. Once on the mountain, the disciples watch as Jesus' face and clothes begin to glow a dazzling white. It is at that moment, the disciples begin to realize that Jesus was telling the truth about who he was and about what he would soon have to endure.

But this still would have been a shock to Peter and the other disciples gathered together on the mountain. They had no doubt that Jesus was the long hoped for messiah. But they figured that Jesus was going to be the kind of messiah that would lead the people of Israel in armed revolt against the Roman government.

And now there they are, watching as Jesus is transformed before them, not into a great warrior, but into someone who is going to be crucified and raised on the third day. With this confirmation, the disciples also see their own future, as people who would, in the days to come, have to deny themselves, take up their cross and follow him.

Following the way God wants us to go instead of only being concerned with what we want is what it means to be a disciple. We are called to follow the way of Jesus, which is often different than the way of the world. This may be why many of us, like Peter, would rather build booths and stay on the mountain.

Remember, Peter suggests building three booths, one for Jesus, one for Moses and one for Elijah. Peter wants to stay on the mountain a little while longer. He wants this revival, if you will, to last for days and days. He knows what waits for him and the others down the mountain, so couldn't we just stay in this holy moment for a little while longer.

Peter says, Jesus it is good for us to be here! It is good for US to be HERE. Far removed from the valley of the shadow of death, far removed from all the issues and struggles of those who live down there. Jesus, it is good for us to be here. It almost sounds like a plea, doesn't it? Jesus, let's just stay here. Let's build some dwellings. Let's get settled here.

This time the rebuke doesn't come from Jesus, but from heaven. "This is my beloved. With him I am well pleased: listen to him! Listen to him! When the disciples hear this, they are overcome by fear. Isn't it interesting? All the supernatural stuff that happened before, Jesus shining, the appearance of Moses and Elijah, doesn't have that effect on them. And maybe it's not even God's booming voice that frightens them, but the message itself Listen to him! Do what he says! Follow him. Down this mountain, to Jerusalem and the cross.

Any illusion Peter, James and John may have had up to this point – that it is possible to stay up there on the mountaintop, and bask in the eternal glory of Christ without any sacrifice – is destroyed. They know where Jesus intends to go. And its frightening.

Jesus then gently touches them, “Get up – and do not be afraid.” I think this is such a beautiful scene – Jesus touching his friends. There is no reason to fear. What you’ve experienced up here is real. Hang on to that. And they come down the mountain. Back to where life is happening with all its joys and sorrows and annoyances.

The black church throughout it’s history as been a place where folks can come and have that mountaintop experience and remember that God is with them on the journey. Through all of their tears, the horrors of slavery and Jim Crow laws and the fight for civil rights, it was the church that centered them and gave them the courage to walk out the doors of the church, come down the mountain if you will, for another week of untold number of horrors.

During our civil rights tour that Gary and I went on, we visited the Legacy Museum. Their presentation is entitled From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration. It is located on the site of a former warehouse where Black people were forced to labor in Montgomery Alabama. When you are entering the museum you are literally walking through the ocean as if you were on a slave ship. It shows you how Mass Incarceration has its beginning in Slavery.

Also on this site is the National Memorial for Peace and Justice that makes you face the history of lynching in America.

More than 4,400 African American Men, women, and children were hanged, burned alive,, shot, and drowned and beaten to death by white mobs between 1877 and 1950. Millions more fled the South as refugees from racial terrorism, profoundly impacting the entire nation. The national lynching memorial is a sacred space for truth telling and reflection about racial terror in America and its legacy.

At the memorial structure on the center of the site is over 800 steel monuments, one for each county in the United States where a racial terror lynching took place. The names of the victims are engraved on the columns. The point of that memorial is for the nation to enter an era of truth telling about racial injustice and their own local histories.

That was a difficult thing to walk through and acknowledge and remember our history as a nation. It also brought to mind what I have continued to learn in my reading of the 1619 project and Stamped from the Beginning about generational trauma that is passed down. Generation after generation of Black Americans can tell you the trauma they have experienced, if we would only listen.

I remember talking to Clara Webb one day and she was sharing her trauma of actually seeing someone that had been lynched. It was decades ago but the way she shared her story, it could have, just as easily, happened yesterday.

We like to be on the mountain top. We like revival. We like to feel the Holy Spirit filling our souls up. But we have to come down the mountain for what we are called to deal with, don’t we? As God said, “Listen to Jesus” And sometimes that is hard to do. Sometimes we like being in the sanctuary where the world is out there, and we are in here soaking up the spirit.

There is more generational trauma that is occurring in our nation. It is the generational trauma of mass shootings and especially of students who, right now, in our own state, are dealing with the trauma of not

one but two shootings in a year and a half. Students from Oxford who were attending Michigan State University had to shelter in place, again. My niece was one of them that had to re-live that trauma again. When I last checked in on her, she said, "It hasn't hit me yet." But sweet Emma, it will. And there have been more mass shootings since the MSU one.

And instead of thoughts and prayers from our congressmen and women, they have taken their flag pins off and are now wearing AR-15 pins. All of us have this trauma. I remember when my father was working at the Royal Oak Post Office during the mass shooting there. I remember every place I walked into for a while, I thought, "Is someone here with a gun?"

And yes, I understand that we are having a mental health crisis in our country, but other countries have mental health issues as well, but in the United States, we have a gun issue. I talked last week about not bowing to idols, like Shadrach, Meshach and Abendego. Our country has put guns before our youth and young adults.

It is hard not to want to stay on that mountain top, isn't it?

We gather today, in this sanctuary, where we can worship and recharge our batter when life's getting to us. Here we bask in God's glory, here we may have our little mountaintop experiences.

But being here is not the goal of our existence as the community of Christ. It is much more like a place from which we then can go back to the valleys of our existence, where joy and sorrow and annoying stuff happens. Here, we are strengthened to be the body of Christ in the world.

Let me read the words of Martin Luther King, Jr. in his last speech before his assassination.

*Well, I don't know what will happen now; we've got some difficult days ahead.
But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind.
Like anybody, I would like to live a long life—longevity has its place.
But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will.
And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over, and I've seen the Promised Land.
I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land.
And so I'm happy tonight; I'm not worried about anything; I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord."*

I am glad there is an outpouring of the Spirit at Asbury, I really am. But I hope that during this mountaintop experience they hear God's words. This is my beloved. Listen to him. And then go out and love people with the unconditional love of Jesus, flip tables of injustice and realize that while it is good to be together with the Holy Spirit, it is also the holy spirit that equips us to go out and serve and stop generational trauma. We are called to do no less.

Amen