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"Plenteous Redemption" The Rev. Kara Leslie (06/09/2024, The Third Sunday after Pentecost)

There are many firsts in our lives.
Maybe some of them you remember, maybe some of them you do not.
You remember your first job, your first car, in detail.
I'm sure the good and the bad.
My first car had holes on the bottom of the floorboard.
So if you went over a puddle, you had to lift your feet up because you'd get splashed.
And the car was older than I was.
But some of us remember our first kiss or your first computer, how big it was, how wide it was, how heavy it was.
And now you can buy them with five pounds and a keyboard included.
And the list can go on.
There are also some firsts that we don't remember.
We don't remember our first birthday.
We probably do not remember our first foods.
And we might not even remember our first like soccer game when you're a child or a sporting event.
Trust me, there was lots of laughter.
Because it really wasn't about the sporting event.
It was about watching kids run around and do what they do.
It was a very fun event for the family.
Well, as a priest, I can remember my very first sermon.
It was about, to about a hundred people, my church, St. John's United Methodist church in Lubbock, Texas,
when I was growing up every Tuesday, the people that were in between homeless and able to make it, to pay rent,
just to have basic utilities.
That wide range of lower middle class and lower class would come.
And we would feed them.
Our hundred people every week would come and we would give them 50 pounds of food from the food bank.
We would give them hygiene boxes full of things like toilet paper and paper towels and things that you needed, laundry soap.
And then we also had a way of checking your blood sugar and your cholesterol and also HIV.
This is in the 80s and the 90s.
And we did this for over 30 years.
And we decided that when they would gather, we needed to do something for their spirit.

And so they asked me to preach a sermon.
And I practiced that sermon for hours and hours, ten times longer than it was.
And I want to show you the place that I practiced, the backyard.
And when I gave this address to Robert and he was pulling it up, he's like, where are the people?
I said, I didn't practice with people.
I practiced with trees and grass for hours and hours.
And most clergy can remember their first sermon, right?
And most of us can also remember our first funeral.
It's been over 25 years since I buried William Goble.
I still have a vanilla folder with his name on it, somewhere in my office.
Bill was his preferred name.
And while he was a patient in the hospital, I would go visit him.
I was a chaplain intern and I would go visit him regularly.
And when I entered his room, he always was on oxygen, had some congestive heart failure issues.
And breathing was hard for him.
But I would enter his room and he would sing me this song.
Deep, even though I want to cross over into camp,
he had a deep voice and it was a visible struggle for him to even say one word.
But every time I went in, he would say, I want to sing you deep river.
And he would sing a few of the verses and one of the lines in this song is,
oh, don't you want to go to that promised land where all is peace?
Clearly, he had a longing for God's peace and one that he had struggled with all his life.
But miracles can be very exciting.
Unexpected guests can show up that were not wanted and you asked them not to attend.
There can be family disagreements right there in the middle of the service, after the service, before the service.
There can be people that are longing for more time with this person who has just passed away.
I'm glad this is over.
All of this happened at his funeral.
Bill had been very successful in building homes, roads and runways.
His company built the runway at Dallas Love Field, put in every single blue light to guide the planes in as they land.
However, he was not successful at home, especially in his relationship with his wife and children.
Some of his children didn't even come to the service because of his alcoholism and abuse and understandably so.
So when he wanted to sing this song deep river, he would use perslip breathing and very methodically say these words of peace and promise land.
I knew it came from a deep place in his soul, a place where he longed for things that this earth and this life couldn't give him.

The song we read this morning also reminds us of how we yearn for plentiful redemption.

On Monday night, we had our class, I held a class on faith and forgiveness, forgiveness and faith, which comes first, which is most important.

And we read this song, and this last verse, plentiful redemption is one of the phrases that everyone was drawn to.

Out of the depths we cry, and there is plentiful redemption.

When you've been overcome by sin, you know the depths of which this psalmist is talking about.

Depths of addiction, depths of depression, depths of loneliness, depths of shame, whatever you're drowning in.

The place you don't want to let anyone into.

Not even God.

Somehow we think we can keep God out of those places, but we can't.

Maybe your marriage is rocky and you both have ventured out and a divorce is coming.

Maybe you have chosen family because your biological family didn't choose you.

They've done everything to ostracize you and push you away, and so you've made your own family.

Truthfully, who among us can stand and declare I'm sin-free?

Who among us?

Not a single one of us can.

If God was into keeping score, we would all be playing with the highest scoring games ever on the hottest, most humid days outside with no wind.

And our scores would be astronomical compared to God.

It would be miserable sinking in to this sense and the angst that it causes.

But hear these words.

For there is forgiveness with you, with God there is plentiful of redemption.

There is no one who can forgive you like God.

No one who can forgive you like God.

A week and try.

And we do try our very best, hopefully to let things go, to offer grace, to give guidance and support.

But it is God who forgives.

Even priests don't forgive.

We can offer absolution.

We can offer a sacrament to absolve your sin.

But the only source for forgiveness is God.

No matter how much we try, no matter how much we've done and miss, God chooses to forgive you.

And slathers you in love and grace so that you can live this life boldly in your relationship with God.

Another interesting fact about this Psalm is the connection between you and God in a very tangible way.

The Psalmist knows that God can hear us because God has ears.

And of course, listen to our prayers.
Now let me be clear.
This does not mean that God is always doing exactly what your prayer request.
If you're requesting something and it doesn't happen, it also doesn't mean that God has an orgy.
Prayer is about relationship, not about outcomes.
And so when we go to God in prayer, it is an intimate experience.
Even in our Old Testament reading this morning, we heard how God was walking in the garden with Adam and Eve.
They heard his footsteps, the flap of his sandals, the switching of his robes, something was heard,
and the vulnerability of God, the presence of the Lord became tangible.
Why is this important?
Because forgiveness calls us to be intimate.
It needs intimacy.
When we feel forgiveness in the core of our being, it is an intimate experience.
The chains are broken.
The worry of not being enough, now, back then, or ever, are gone.
They're diminished.
And our liberty in Christ is felt.
The connection of our humanity and the humanity of God makes plentiest redemption.
We link into the very core of our breath.
It is an intimate experience to be forgiven.
To be forgiven by God.
Now I'm going to take a risk here and push us a little bit.
Because the gift of forgiveness, and yes, it is a gift to be received and given.
This is exactly why we are to extend that to others.
Why we are to share forgiveness to others.
It's a way that we give God thanks for all the glory that God has in our lives.
It helps God's glory and kingdom and love grow when we take forgiveness and offer it to others.
The gift of grace, the gift of forgiveness, the gift of what is not seen,
but yet felt the gift of Jesus Christ who died and was raised from the dead is meant to be given and shared.
Even the message of Jesus Christ is plentious redemption.
Plentious redemption.
So in soft ways like the wafer in your hand.
In calming ways like the deep river of peace.
In ways that are strong and stark like a beautiful rainbow.
All of these are plentious.
And they are ways to describe the way God forgives us and comes into our lives in intimate ways.
To set us free.

To bring us into his grace.
To help us know that we are redeemed in his name.
Our Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.