

In our house the current Netflix obsession is a Danish show called Herrens Veje, or God's Way, which is a show about what we would call a Lutheran Pastor and his family. In it, the younger son, who is also a pastor, preaches a sermon and says to his congregants "You want to speak a New Testament world but live in an old testament one!"

Those words struck me and kept coming to me as I prepared for today. Pentecost is the culmination of Easter. Jesus has left the earth in body, but the Holy Spirit remains to ensure that the presence of Christ never leaves. And it remains in the world through us, the faithful (or at least attempted faithful). But just as Jesus' message was uncomfortable to the people of his day, it remains so to us today as the active presence of Christ in the world must come through us by the Holy Spirit and I have come to believe that just may be the pang of childbirth that Paul speaks of.

I have been present at three child births....

Both my sons, and then the one where I was the fourteen pound awaited guest.... To those of you who have been the working side of that situation, I offer my gratitude, praise, and humble admiration. No male can endure what you have on a human scale.

But all of us deal with it each day on a spiritual scale. The birth of a Christ-following, Christ-centered, and Christ-like world is painful, and each of us are bringing that into the world today just as the followers of Christ have been since this moment recorded in Acts.

The Holy Spirit is the presence of God in the world. While it is in the world and moving, it is active through us, and we are the ones in the throes of those birthing pains.

You may say to me, "no, not at all! I'm perfectly comfortable with being the embodiment of the message of Jesus in the world today." If that's the case, you are either lying or you aren't listening to the real message of Jesus.

The real message of Jesus is so contrary to the message of the world, even 2000 years on, that the real message of Jesus should make us all uncomfortable. The real message of Jesus is that EVERYONE is a child of God and worthy of God's love and to truly treat everyone that way is uncomfortable to the point of being painful, even to the point of the pain of childbirth.

Recently I overheard a person I knew was ELCA Lutheran ranting about all this talk about racism in the church and we should just move on. No! No we shouldn't. We must acknowledge that there are God's children who have been and are judged and treated differently because of the color of their skin and not only is it wrong, we must acknowledge that the church has been complicit for years in their marginalization and continues to be.

The greater church has underfunded pastors of color and parishes of color. Our local congregations have had black pastors serve them and people refuse to take the very

body of Christ from the hands of a black person. Wine was okay, he hadn't touched it.... How dare we refuse the gift of the very body of the one who gave himself for us because someone who had melanin in their skin had touched it. And that's not a moment from 1960, that's from within the last five years.

How about the congregations that "just aren't ready" for a female Pastor or a pastor who loves someone of the same gender as themselves? Those congregations say such things while at the same time overlooking the misconduct of the male pastors that have served our church for decades. The birth pangs are brought about when we hold ourselves accountable individually and as a greater church and have the uncomfortable conversations about our past and our present in order to change our future. The pangs strike us when we fail to embrace the gifts of love being preached and led by someone that doesn't fit our personal mold of "pastor." Yet that was the Samaritan, the woman at the well, the Canaanite official, Paul, or any of Biblical folks we preach so lovingly about.

If we want to live a New Testament life, we must endure the pangs of discomfort that come when we realize that the word of God can and does come from the very people that make us uncomfortable. And if you are uncomfortable hearing this, I promise you I'm uncomfortable saying it. But it is the very essence of Christ. Christ comes from and exists in the places of discomfort in our world, because those are the people and places most open to receiving him truly, honestly, and not for show or social gain.

Love them all and let God sort them out, to play on a much more violent phrase. But that is what the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost to tell us. Yes, the disciples are all speaking in different languages, but perhaps those languages aren't just languages as we know them, but languages of love.

My sister went to a memorial recently and the grandson of the deceased led the service. The minister's mother, my sister's friend, leans to my sister and says, yep, my tatted up boy turned out to be the one who ministers to prisoners. OF COURSE HE IS. If I walked in to a prison decked out in my bow tie, I would have a much harder time than this man, because God knows that the word of God must come to people through a method that they are open to. And that's a birthing pang, because not everyone likes to hear the word of God from middle aged white men with short hair, sometimes the Holy Spirit uses a polar opposite vessel to someone like me to be active in the world and we must become comfortable with that.

We see the Old Testament world as one where God reigned down justice with fire and brimstone, we like that, because we like to see people get their comeuppance. I'm first in line to admit it. There are just some folks that I like to see get smited. How very Old Testament of me.

Instead, the Holy Spirit comes and shows me that yes, society and I may punish that person, but Jesus knows that they need love and forgiveness and we are the body of Jesus today, so get to forgiving. It's painful, it's hard, and it requires me to grit, brace and focus, just like a person in labor. It is a task I must do, no matter how painful and

how much I don't want to. No matter how much it scares me and it will hurt. But I, forgiven daily by that very God, must be the vessel for that forgiveness to those I don't want to forgive.

Was it not Christ who looked at the people who had driven nails through his limbs and said "Father forgive them? They know not what they do?" That forgiveness didn't take away his pain. That prayer didn't end his physical suffering, but it did end the spiritual division between him and those who had wronged him.

Was it not Christ who, while in absolute agony, unable to breathe, lungs filling with fluid, turned to the repentant person also crucified and offered forgiveness? He could have said "Shut up, you at least deserve to be here" but instead he offered forgiveness.

That's the New Testament life that has been trying to be born through the faithful for generations. And somehow, we stay in labor, because we can't quite embrace the world that needs to be born through us in the Holy Spirit. We are afraid of it. Just as a mother is forever changed by giving new life, these birthing pangs mean new life for us, one without passing judgement on someone as a matter of power, but loving, forgiving them, and helping them find a new way. One where we treat individuals as individuals rather than nameless groups of folks with no humanity. One that acknowledges that your understanding of love is yours and that if someone else sees the same love in a different person, if that love is of Christ, then so be it.

The birth pangs have lasted too long, but they will continue. For no matter how much I want to hold myself as a truly New Testament person, I am still holding on to that vengeful Old Testament world. I can't fully let the spirit blossom through me, though I try and pray that it does. Each of us in that boat, wanting a New Testament world while clinging to the Old Testament ways. I pray that each of us finds a way to loosen our grip so that the Holy Spirit can be born in the world through us sharing a new language of love and forgiveness that is so truly a Christ-like, people think that we too are drunk or out of our minds. Amen.