

Sermon

November 20, 2016 | The Last Sunday after Pentecost
Luke 23:33-43 | Addie Domske

Good morning. Today I'd like to talk about setting out more table settings at the Eucharist Table, about radically hospitable ministry, about a trip my spouse, Dan, and I just went on to Standing Rock, ND for a Clergy Call to action¹ (issued by a North Dakota Episcopal priest) to sit-in with people, native and non-native, who are protesting the completion of the Dakota Access Pipeline, which ends its route here in Illinois. I hope my inclination for going to ND offers an encouraging way forward in your own spiritual justice work.

So, to back up -- my name is Addie Domske. I'm usually up here announcing awesome events our youth will partake in Sunday nights (SPR Jeopardy tonight!) But in my life outside of SPR, I'm a social worker, a new spouse, a reluctant turtle and enthusiastic cat owner, a recent seminary grad, and...dare I say, a Presbyterian.

I'm in the last stage of ordination with the Presbyterian church, so on weekdays I work for the church's national Israel/Palestine network. We push the national church to listen to what Palestinians call for to achieve just peace in Israel/Palestine. (In 2013, when I was a parishioner at SPR, the arts committee displayed photography from my summer in the Holy Land. So, SPR was validating me in this work before the PC(USA), just to be clear.)

We recently had our annual meeting for this I/P group and I was asked to facilitate a conversation on its future. In its ten years, the network accomplished most of its goals--church-wide divestment, government lobbying, boycotts. So, they let the millennial in leadership decide, "where are we going?" I decided -- "intersectionality."

Intersectionality is a sociological term. When I studied social work my computer's spell-check still didn't recognize it, so it's ok if you don't, but after today, put it in your pocket, carry it with you; it's an important concept. Intersectionality describes the interconnected nature of social categorizations. Race/ethnicity, disability, class, gender identity, immigration status, whom you love, how old you

are...we often view these as silo-ed identities. A Black person. A white person.

Intersectionality complicates those categories. Seeing "intersectional-y" sees overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage. A Black middle-class person. A poor white person. A trans* woman of color with disability. Intersectionality honors that we are more than one part of our identity *and* that one person is not a representative of their entire community because that community is also diverse.

Intersectionality also provides strategic ways of fighting oppressive systems.² Rather than fighting patriarchy, we fight cis- and hetero-normative patriarchy. Rather than fighting white supremacy, we fight imperialist capitalist white supremacy. To fight mass incarceration, we also fight mass detention of undocumented folks.

While I was at Standing Rock--they had a camp loudspeaker for announcements, singing prayers, yielding to guests to offer testimony or update on an action. I lovingly called it "Standing Rock radio" and couldn't get enough of the hilarious announcers. The announcers changed, but each announcer called everyone "relative:"

"My relative comes from the UCC bringing greetings."

"My relative lost his wallet; I checked the credit cards, they're expired; no use at casino."

"My relative from New Mexico wants to share about her tribe."

"My relative who owns x car needs to move it-- and the tags on the license plate are almost expired."

Native or white or mixed or black or brown, we were all "relatives." The Jeremiah passage speaks to this--woe to you who has scattered the flock. We are one flock. Our relatives, our flock, are scattered, but it is the Lord's intent to gather us and shepherd us from fear and loss.³

¹ http://www.clergyclimateaction.org/clergy_standing_with_standing_rock

² What bell hooks calls "The System." (hooks, *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love.*)

³ Jeremiah 23:1-6

This is certainly not to say that we all have the same (silo-ed) identity. (Who has relatives that are different from you?) Finding coalitions doesn't mean we resist the same way. We can respect the uniqueness of our struggles *and* recognize we all showed up for the fight. Like we read in Colossians, we are not singular, but we are made to dwell in the *fullness* of God.⁴ Fullness ≠ sameness. "Relatives" ≠ sameness. But they allude to intersection.

Ok, are you with me on intersectionality?

So I led this intersectionality workshop. This could be a way forward, I said: to see our movements as connected. I reminded them of Palestinian women writing to women in Flint.⁵ Of Gazan men writing⁶ to Ferguson activists about treating teargas, of BLM activists visiting Palestine to study nonviolent resistance.⁷ I reminded them that Palestinians have always shown intersectional solidarity by painting images of other movements on the Wall that separates Israel from the West Bank. (They even painted one to Presbyterians when we divested!)

As I proposed this way forward for the network, I felt hypocritical. Because I had been reading about *Standing Rock*; and I had done nothing to put myself at the feet of native siblings' storytelling. I hadn't intersected the work. So when I got home, we packed up the Prius with camping supplies, slept in Walmart's parking lot, and eventually made it to Oceti Sakowin Camp, north of Standing Rock Sioux tribe's reservation in N. and S. Dakota.

We spent four days listening to elders at the camp: attending direct action training, camp meetings, water ceremonies, and home cooked meals from the camp kitchens. The camp had signs throughout listing "Direct Action Principles" set forth by camp leaders. The list was explicitly non-violent, and the second to last rule was: "This is a ceremony. Act accordingly." The people of Standing Rock see their work as inherently spiritual.

Let's bring this conversation to Luke; I want us to consider that practicing intersectional work in this church, city, country; over Thanksgiving tables... is to be more like two people in Luke's story. There are these "criminals" hanging by Jesus. We don't know who they are, we don't know what they did, we just have dialogue. One criminal says: *Hey Jesus, if God sent you, why don't you save yourself...and us!?* The other cuts in: *Don't you believe in God? You're about to die! We actually got what we deserved, but this guy did nothing wrong.*

Modeling the *second* criminal prioritizes Jesus' innocence. Division feeds on something called "notions of deservedness," another sociology phrase: basically, whether or not someone deserves what they have in life. This criminal is directly calling out notions of deservedness on the cross: *We deserve this; he does not.*

What would our country look like if we saw the other on the cross as innocent? How has our church evolved as we looked at the other on the cross and called them "innocent" instead of criminal? To me, this has made the Eucharist table wider, and our God bigger. By recognizing innocence in the other, we pull up a chair for them at the Table. This is how I see the Eucharist at this church. We try to make the Table bigger.

The second person I want us to be more like is Jesus. The criminal recognizing Jesus says, *Jesus, don't forget me when I die.* And Jesus replies, *I won't.* This criminal has already admitted guilt; they said they are getting what they deserve. But Jesus transcends guilt, offering a seat at Paradise's Table. When we first pulled into Oceti Sakowin Camp, we rolled down our windows and said to the man at the gate, "We're here with the clergy! Where should be pitch our tent!?" He looked us both in the eyes, shook our hands, and said "Welcome home."

⁴ Colossians 1:11-20

⁵ <https://www.mecaforpeace.org/news/women-gaza-women-flint>

⁶ <http://mondoweiss.net/2016/10/letter-black-america/>

⁷ <https://policy.m4bl.org/invest-divest/>

That is radical hospitality. Here we were, criminals, who had taken this home from its dwellers to make our own called America, and still we were being welcomed back to the Table. This man was doing ministry on the cross.

So, where can we be these two people from Luke, in Chicago, on the south side, at SPR?

I went to Standing Rock initially because I care about Palestinians.

What do you care about that can move your body into a new space with a new people?

Through me as a white American Christian, white supremacy, settler colonialism, hierarchical theology have created an unjust sentence against my relatives.

Where can you recognize the innocence in another whom the System has deemed guilty?

We, in our own complex identities, we poor, Black, queer, disabled, trans*, young, old, non-citizen, the "#imwithers"—we feel innocent on the cross, yet we have the opportunity to do ministry while we're there.

This is not some twisted "suffering makes us stronger" theology. This is hope. This is our call for ministry on the cross: not to be just hospitable, but radically, irrationally, "they-don't-deserve-it-edly" hospitable.

Last Tuesday, the people of Palestine painted a picture of a native women, proud and strong on the Wall and sent images of it to Standing Rock, saying, "your story is our story."⁸

This is a way forward. The work ahead is intersectional work. The work ahead is *spiritual* work.

"This is a ceremony. Act accordingly."

Note: You can find out more information about Standing Rock by looking through the hashtags #StandingRock or #NoDAPL on Facebook or Twitter, and by viewing videographers on the ground like Myron Dewey, founder of Digital Smoke Signals. He uploads to Facebook and YouTube. To find out ways to support from afar, visit the Oceti Sakowin Camp website, where they keep an updated list of items needed for the camp's work.

⁸ http://wearenotnumbers.org/home/Story/Gaza_stands_with_Standing_Rock