

February 10, 2018
Community Prayer Service

Mark 9:2-9

I have a problem with clean clothes. At least I did when my kids were little. I was that mom who always brought her kids to church in tattered pants, untied shoes, and stained shirts. There was usually a cowlick or two in their uncombed hair – I couldn't have created a better bedhead if I had tried. A little jam on their faces and dirt on their hands. One was always grumpy, one in tears. I was just tired.

And then there was that other mom – you know the one - whose kids came in all proper with freshly pressed button up shirts, little sports coats, neatly combed hair and they always talked in their church voices. I dreaded seeing those families. We couldn't measure up no matter how hard we tried.

It was solidified for me one Easter Sunday when my youngest – in his wrinkled pants and untucked shirt told me he wasn't feeling too well and minutes later proceeded to throw up all over the church patio at the nice Easter reception with those very properly dressed children looking on.

It was kind of like the children's story "*Alexander and the, terrible, horrible, no good very bad day.*" I walked away from the reception remembering Alexander's last line in the story where he says, some days are just like that. Some days are just like that when you keep trying but things seem so stacked against you. When everyone else seems to be getting it right and you feel as though you are just barely getting by. When simply showing up is an achievement that you cherish even though no one may ever know how hard it was to get from point A to point B.

And then there were those clean clothes. How I just wanted clean clothes.

In our scripture reading tonight, we are told that Jesus has some really clean clothes. In fact, we are told they are dazzling. So dazzling that no amount of Clorox bleach could have gotten them so bright. No amount of human effort could have scrubbed and pressed hard enough to even come close to the radiance of that moment. I want you to notice that...No amount of human effort made this possible. That's a good thing because I was already woefully missing the mark on my laundry skills and didn't need one more unattainable standard to live up to.

It feels as though life is full of standards. And when we don't measure up it's easy to feel like a failure. But the text reminds me that something else is going on here, something that isn't supposed to be measured or compared or even achieved. Jesus' brilliance came from simply opening his heart to God.

We call these type of moments "thin spaces." Those moments when we find ourselves on our knees, completely open to receiving God's grace, knowing that nothing else will get us through. And in those thin spaces we pray, help me God. Give me strength. Heal me. Comfort me.

Because I can't do it on my own. My clothes are tattered, my hands are dirty, my body is tired and I need you so much God.

I don't doubt that all of us have struggled with trying to fulfill someone's else's standards of what it means to be successful or beautiful or smart or funny. And there's always someone who seems to be doing better than we are. It's hard to get away from and if we are honest, we all know the truth behind it all – we will never be able to reach that mark of being good enough. And when we are going through difficult times, those mile markers of success seem all that more unattainable. And we feel defeated.

In those moments, the Gospel asks us to simply open our hearts to God, to something other than our own efforts. It reminds us that transformation, success, happiness and wholeness come from one place alone...through God's generous love for us. A love that renews our hope, comforts our pain, and guides us out of those terrible, horrible, no good very bad days. That's the radiance that is offered to each of us.

Jesus just asks us to show up, tattered, stained, wrinkled clothes and all. Just as we are. Jesus asks us to come and allow God to do the cleaning.