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Sermon – Luke 3:15-17, 21-22
January 6, 2019
The Gift of the Threshing Floor

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be reflections of your word to us this morning. Bless us with the eyes to see and ears to hear your gifts to us. Amen.

Um

I was looking through my facebook feed in the middle of the week and saw multiple posts saying, “how is it only Wednesday?” Either in a post by itself or as a header to a news story, people expressed their exhaustion at what’s happening in the world, which is really saying something. Things are coming at us from all sides, and we’re doing our best to physically, mentally and emotionally, spiritually even, stay above water, but it’s a struggle. With the Trump effect reaching a new level of disruption in the world, weekly news stories about new effects of climate change, and the is the crisis in Yemen, sometimes the news just makes me weep. We live in particularly stressful political times. Meanwhile, we walk with friends and family with illnesses, who struggle with jobs and children, and situations they cannot control. There’s so much going on in and around us that sometimes the accumulation of it all just sounds like noise.

When I read the gospel text for this week, the image of the threshing floor leapt out at me, not so much as an image of separating Jesus followers from non-followers, but as a process for us to clear out the noise around our lives, so it’s easier to manage in challenging times . . . so it’s easier to hear God in the midst of it all.

Imagine this large, hard surface where sheaves of grain are opened up and spread around so the threshing board, pulled by donkeys can move round and round, breaking open the stalks. It must just look like chaos when they lead the donkeys away. But the mess is unavoidable: in order to extract the part you want to keep, you have to destroy the structure of the stalk. And then you’ve got a chaff

everywhere, a lot of work ahead of you, but a clear way forward. The broken stalks and grain are then collected and thrown into the air; the wind blows the chaff away while the grain falls on the ground. What would this look like in our own lives? How do we clear out the chaos and the noise so we can hear God better? If I was going to bring the idea of the threshing floor to our lives, where would I put it? What would it look like? It might look like people's homes.

I rarely hear people talk about clutter in their homes or accumulating stuff, but that has shifted recently and I'm honestly glad I'm not alone in this. An overabundance of stuff actually has a huge effect on people in a culture that values acquiring things. But the struggle is not just the things, it's the noise those things create in our lives. Now to be fair, some people are excellent at keeping a tidy house; though I bet you somewhere in that house there's going to be a room or a closet or a junk drawer that is an absolute mess. We cram things in there and quickly shut the door so we're not reminded of the mountain of indecision inside. It's as if they are mirrors of our experience of the world around us . . . or perhaps the world within us.

I was recently introduced to Marie Kondo through her Netflix series "Tidying Up;" Marie has put her finger on the pulse of our culture and has blown in like Mary Poppins to help with the clutter and the noise!

Marie is a petite Japanese woman with a quiet sparkle. She comes into people's homes, and after getting acquainted with people and their experience of living in the home through her translator, she kneels on the floor, closes her eyes and introduces herself to the home, asking it to support the tidying up process. (it's very cool)

Lesson 1 is clothing. Take all of your clothes and put them in one big pile. Hold each item and ask, does this spark joy for me? Yes? keep; no? say thank you and put in the GIRO pile. Recognizing that spark of joy comes more easily to some at first, but it's something everyone is able to identify and develop with practice. Then she shows the people how to fold clothing items into small rectangles and

store them vertically in drawers. Items that need to be hung have space in the closet and shoes are displayed or neatly tucked away.

Over the course of several weeks, Marie takes people on a methodical journey – by category – through every item in their home, helping them clarify how they feel about each one. Does this item spark joy? Is this item essential for my life? Does this item need to come with me into the future? For Marie, this process is not about getting rid of things; it's about clarifying and gratitude. We don't have to live with an overabundance of things we don't care about, rather we can hone clarity and recognize joy in ourselves so that we can find the wheat in the pile of chaff and celebrate it. She teaches people to create a place for everything so that when you clean up, you know where things go. It eliminates the mind chatter, "where shall I put this? Oh, I'll just stick it here." She encourages people to use boxes to store everything from snacks in the cupboard that have been opened, to spare rubber bands. When I watch Marie work with people I am amazed at her own clarity and how she quietly teaches people how to develop that skill of clarity within themselves. She teaches people how to find peace that comes from clarity. People emerge from the tidying up process with cleaner boundaries between family members, deeper respect for each other and other people's things, a renewed sense of partnership, shared responsibility for the household, a deeper appreciation for the things they own, peace about the space they have claimed and what they have kept after the passing of a loved one, more space in their lives and more time on their hands.

While the chaos of the world rolls on, most of which we have no control over, we can be intentional about the way we live our lives and the spaces we call home. We can set intentions and receive the help of the Holy Spirit to follow through and craft the life we are called to. We can clear out the noise we have control over so we can hear God more clearly.

It's interesting to me that though he didn't use the metaphor quite in this way, this is precisely what John the Baptizer was calling people to before Jesus' ministry. He called people to repent and examine our lives, to have the courage to dig into our lives and lift the winnowing fork to the wind, to

the Spirit, allowing the chaff to be blown away. It's messy; the chaff goes everywhere, sticks to our skin, goes in our eyes and clothing, but in the end, we have clarity, we know what is going to support our lives going forward, and we remember who we are. This is the blessing of the threshing floor.

Then John leads us to the river to be washed clean of the chaff in the cool water; to name what has been true all along, that we are beloved children of God. We are washed and blessed and celebrated in the way Jesus was.

Whatever threshing floor experience Jesus had before entering ministry – and that would be interesting to know – it ends at the moment of his baptism as his ministry officially begins. Each year at this time we are reminded of this moment when Jesus comes forward with clarity to say, “the time has come, I am ready – come and follow me.” He comes to baptism in solidarity with us, to say I am not above you, I am with you, through all that life brings: on the threshing floor and in baptism, I am with you. And just as God claims me as God's beloved, God claims you.

As the issues of the world swirl around us, we gather together to worship and remember not so much the event of our baptism if we were old enough to remember, but that we are baptized. We gather to remember who we committed to be as disciples of Jesus, and renew those commitments. We gather to wake our spirits with holy water, that they may reach anew for the Holy One with us. We gather to celebrate our many blessings, and to walk gratefully.

After Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness

The remembrance of Baptism is something that is shared by our Anglican and United traditions to renew us and help us remember who we are. I invite you to participate as you feel comfortable. In a moment I'm going to go to the back and bless the water, which is available for to you to bless yourself as you go out into the world. People often touch their fingers to the water and touch their forehead or make the sign of the cross. You are invited to do what fits for you.

Walk to back