

LOVE BOLDLY ACT SHREWDLY
Randall Tremba
September 18, 2016
25th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

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Jeremiah 8:18-9:1

My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick. O that my head were a spring of water, and my eyes a fountain of tears, so that I might weep day and night for the slain the poor of my people!

Luke 16:1-13

Then Jesus said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property."

So much has been destroyed. I have cast my lot with those who, age after age, perversely, with no extraordinary power, reconstitute the world. Adrienne Rich

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A few words from the prophet Jeremiah, who is known in our tradition as "the weeping prophet."

My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick. O that my head were a spring of water, and my eyes a fountain of tears, so that I might weep day and night for the slain of my people!

There is a time to weep. Jesus wept over the plight of his people. He was known as "the man of sorrow and acquainted with grief." But sorrow need not exclude hope.

Once upon a time, said Jesus, a certain wealthy man entrusted the care of his property to a manager. The manager squandered the owner's wealth and was given his termination papers.

What shall I do, moaned the manager? I can't earn a living with my hands and I refuse to beg. My future is grim and bleak.

There is a time to weep. But sorrow does not exclude hope.

The manager hit upon a grand and cunning scheme. He called his master's various tenants in one by one and began reducing their debts. *How much do you owe my master, he asked one? A hundred jugs of oil, replied the first. Make in 50 and the rest will be forgiven.*

Thank you, thank you, cried the forgiven orchardist. You'll always have a place in my heart and my home.

To another he asked, *what do you owe my master?* A hundred bushels of wheat. *Make it 80 and the rest will be forgiven.*

Thank you, thank you cried the forgiven farmer. You'll always have a place in my heart and in my home.

And so it went until the manager had curried enough favors at the master's expense that he would never lack for friends to take him in. Just like that the manager had created a small circle of compassion for himself.

When the master arrived and heard what the manager had done, he was amazed at the ingenuity of the dishonest manager and commended him for acting shrewdly.

And what if, Jesus mused. What if those who serve God, which is to say, serve the Spirit of Compassion, acted as shrewdly as those narcissists who serve wealth and themselves? What if those who long for the kingdom of God, the Beloved Community on earth, were as shrewd? What

might we forgive to release others from crushing burdens?

If a dishonest manager of wealth can reconstitute the world for his own benefits, what then might we who are entrusted with a wealth of privilege and power including divine gifts of compassion, courage and wisdom do to reconstitute the world in the image of the kingdom of God, or what I prefer to call "the kinship of God," in which all belong.

President Abraham Lincoln loved the United States of America and wept over the plight of its people. *O that my head were a spring of water, and my eyes a fountain of tears, so that I might weep day and night for the slain of my people!* He wept but his sorrow did not exclude hope.

Abraham Lincoln loved the United States of America. But to preserve the union and to free the slaves he had to act shrewdly in a political way as he did in drafting the Emancipation Proclamation 154 years ago this month. It was an effort to reconstitute American society.

The Proclamation was met with criticism, cynicism and praise. Frederick Douglass himself, a reluctant supporter, thought it morally lame. On the other hand, the Republican Senator Charles Sumner said that the skies are brighter and the air is purer now that Slavery is handed over to judgment. Horace Greeley, editor of the New York Tribune, wrote: "Let the President know that everywhere throughout the land he is hailed as the Wisest and Best. He re-creates a nation." Which is to say, a certain world was shrewdly reconstituted.

Lincoln loved his country. Love is necessary. But love and compassion alone are not enough. Courage and wisdom are also needed. Lincoln couldn't get all he wanted; but he got something. It wasn't perfect or complete; but it was a good start in the right direction.

The kingdom of God, said Jesus, is like a mustard seed.

We can't eliminate all the darkness in the world, but we can hold up a light. We can plant a seed. We can love boldly and act shrewdly.

Many of us weep over the plight of black lives, blue lives and many other vulnerable and broken lives in our society. *My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick.* There is a time to weep. But there's also a time to get to work healing what is broken. Love boldly. Act shrewdly. That seems to be the unspoken mantra of Fr. Greg Boyle's book, *Tattoos on the Heart*, featured in our Sunday morning seminar, "On Becoming the Beloved Community."

The seminar is designed to lead us to a place of wisdom through self-examination and the exposure of invisible systems of power, privilege and oppression. If you can't attend, at least get the reading list and start educating yourself.

We can't eliminate all the darkness in the world, but we can hold up a light. We can plant a seed. We can love boldly and act shrewdly.

Many people love this planet and weep over its death spiral. Polar caps are melting, seas are rising, species and habitats are disappearing. It's enough to make us cry our eyes out. *My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick.*

There is a time to weep. But there's also a time to get to work healing what is broken.

Out of deep love for the earth, scientists, environmentalists, ordinary citizens, and some politicians are working hard to better understand ecology, the infinitely complicated interconnected web of life. It's not enough to love the planet. Love is necessary but not sufficient. Wisdom and courage are also needed. We must act shrewdly to save what we can.

We can't eliminate all the darkness in the world, but we can hold up a light. We can't bridge every divide in our society, but we can bridge some. We can't save every species, but we can save some. We can love boldly and act shrewdly.

In case you didn't know or hadn't heard, we are capable of great love, courage and wisdom. It's only a matter of awakening the divine love and wisdom within to do something good with God for the world today.