

A Season of Epiphanies!

“Emotional Cliff: Loves Got Everything to Do With It”

Jeremiah 1:4-10, 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, Luke 4:21-30
February 3, 2019
Rerun of February 3, 2013

After first reading of Lucan passage:

I invite you to hear the passage again now, more deeply.
Hear it as if you were there in the crowd around Jesus...
as an observer.

Listen to the tone of the crowd's expectations as they shift from temple to cliff.

Note the two examples Jesus gives of prophets who went to meet the needs of one person in the midst of the needs of many,
Engaging who we would call the outsider, the foreigner, the powerless...

Engaging those ready to participate in the solution not just wait for it to come from someone or somewhere else...perhaps what those in Nazareth expected...
a quick fix?

Jesus points to the stories of prophets who engage individuals in need who are ready to listen and choose what would seem to the many a risky

response to what's going on,

do the unexpected through their faith, and act.

I wonder if what we most deeply desire healed or fed or satisfied within...this holy healing, this work....can really only be done one on one.

And, we as individuals...together as insiders/community/church/nation,

we have the ability to do much as individuals
if we only will,
but so often chose not to.

We have power we don't use and so the prophet's attention goes to those who seemingly,

by usual standards have no power to change the circumstances they find themselves in,

but are willing to...try!

Listen further and you hear the crowd's anger as they lead Jesus to the brow of the hill their town was built on.

I wonder what is the hill we have built our community on/you have built your life on.

Is there a cliff we threaten to push people off if they do not say or do as we want?

Might I have more than one cliff or a different set of cliffs for different people? Why?

What is that in me that feels so threatened?

And, wonder how it is Jesus manages to walk through the crowd and just go on his way if they were so enraged with him.

Is it they were so self-involved with their anger, they forgot what they were really angry about?

After all, it's a lot more fun to be angry than it is to be thoughtful. Listen again for the word of God.

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As approach second reading from Corinthians:

Well, not a pretty picture of us in Luke, hey?  
A hard passage to hear.

And if you were going to pick a passage to compliment it...what would you pick?

At first glance, our second reading seems as far away from the first reading as it could possibly be...

OR, maybe the first passage is exactly the lens through which we are called to look at this familiar passage....

often used at weddings, maybe more appropriately used in times of discord and anger and self-righteousness.

The Word of God:

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I think they came expecting to experience the wonder of the hometown boy made good,  
to benefit from the miracles directly themselves now....

as certainly they had an inside track....

**and he didn't give them what they wanted.**

I wonder why he just didn't make everyone happy.

...what a struggle it must have been for him,  
"I have to say *this* to these people I know and care about."

It must have taken an awe-full lot of courage.

*It may be hard to relate to Jesus.*

I don't think it is as hard to relate to the crowd.

We often push around people we don't agree with  
or want something from

who don't respond the way we want them to,  
or challenge our authority...

we push them off cliffs.

How?

...by not being genuine with them and then gossiping about them,

by not being open to hearing them and finding the piece of truth in what they share,

by not extending grace to them while expecting them to extend it to us,

by not inviting them into a real process of making choices with us,

by not sharing our real feelings in the moment and then going away mad and blowing up at some little thing later.

...You know....like when you're nice to everybody here at church and then you go home

and push the spouse or child off a cliff

yelling at them or blaming them or dismissing their requests

because you're stressed out  
or are just plain old "too tired" to cope.

So often we act out with the people we're closest to ...because it feels safer...they can't leave us...

wouldn't really hurt us or push us back...*so we think.*

This kind of anger sabotages life and is the underbelly,  
the shadow side, of trust. It is trust broken.

And then, here come the words on "love" from Corinthians.

If you really listen to Paul's words, it becomes clear "love" doesn't necessarily have a lot to do with feelings.

Love, instead, is a matter of intention and will.

Jesus loves them so much he is willing to say what is true in kindness and pay whatever the price in the short run,  
up close and personal.

He entrusts them to deal with the truth about themselves.

And, rather than be distracted from his mission  
or get bogged down defending his words,  
getting caught up in some trumped up conflict,

Jesus simply goes about doing what God would have him do next.

'If they weren't ready to choose life, let me find who is ready!'

And he gives them every opportunity, right up to the very last moment, before he makes his break.

He gave them every opportunity to believe/belove and respond...before moving on to more "fertile ground" to grow the good news.

He knew deeply they already had everything they need to make something new happen...already within them...  
like with Jeremiah....

There are no excuses

even though we can come up with really great  
self-justifications for not being  
who we are created and called to be!

There is no record Jesus ever went back to his home town.

But I don't think they were left out in the cold...  
but they were left to their own devices...to talk amongst themselves and take another  
look and begin to figure it out

and so maybe that day *was* the beginning of something new in them....maybe  
something came into self-awareness

that would allow them to be co-creators in their own healing...  
the lasting healing of new ways of living.

We are to be co-creators in our own wellness, miracles. And for many of us there is  
much to do within ourselves  
before we can make expectations of others, or really be positioned to help them.

To be like those prophets! We are the prophets!

And this is LOVE!

So we honor this knowing:

Love is...not necessarily nice...nice, the malaise of church people and our greater  
culture which keeps us all stuck.

Christians are not nice...Jesus wasn't!  
He is and we are intentional. And this is love!

So, friends,

what part of “love” is hardest for you when someone tells you a truth or challenges your choices or perceptions?

What part of live is hardest for you when you begin to form expectations of others?

You know...meet my expectations or I'll want to push you off my cliff?

In the words of Corinthians...is it...

Resisting irritability or resentment...no matter how tired or overworked you are?  
(Mine!)

Resisting gloating and boasting when you think you're right?

Being kind and patient when someone isn't being kind or patient with you?

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There are times when things happen and we just can't figure out how it all came to this.

There are times when life...and God!...disappoint us

or the answers to our questions and problems are blunt!

At such times, do we “love” or do we push others...
even ourselves,

push truth, love, God away,
off cliffs....like the people of Nazareth did?

We can't push God over a cliff (God won't go!),
but we can distance ourselves from God and others,

often those dearest to us...*that* we can do...and this just isn't very helpful.

God will never push you off a cliff.

God will never distance himself from you
no matter what your choices have been so far.

NEVER!

And God is always bringing you others to journey with you and help you. Don't you really already know who they are?

Even though you may not understand how you got where you are or are confused as to what to do next, even though the cliff is right over there....within pushing distance....

love never ends. God's love and possibility for you never ends!

You, endure!

...for it's not what you don't understand that is your challenge, it's what you do understand.

**And you can handle, with God's gracious help,
what you do understand...if you only will!**

What do you understand about that Christmas epiphany now?

Paul says...and it is true:

We are becoming adults. (Some of our kids the best adults in the crowd!)

"Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then (when we remember the call of love and its simplistic yet bold ways) we will see face to face.

Now, we know only in part, but then we will know fully and be known fully as we remember that faith, love, hope abide, these three;

**the greatest of these is love....
the will to love,
naming truths and being genuine
in relationships and in community,**

even in the face of being thrown off a cliff!

...love is having the courage to keep on walking instead of letting things get to you, killing off your own energy.

Love is resisting throwing yourself off the cliff of self-righteousness, or hopelessness or joining the crowd instead of walking through them remembering what is truly important.

**Love is having the courage not to rescue,
to stay alongside, to speak the truth,
to think outside the box, to see....
truly see the thing most needed.**

To see ourselves more clearly!

Friends, we are not to fall in love....with each other or this community or this nation.

We are to fall FOR love!

Take the fall if that's what it takes...for love to rise...

live your epiphanies....just one of them...live it!