

“Who Am I To Hinder God?”

John 13:31-35, Acts 11:1-18

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Rerun of May 92, 2004

One time, as I shared with a friend who does massage therapy...shared my own self-doubts and was pretty self-effacing...she said to me...Karen, I wish people could see what I see as I stand at their foot or their head preparing to do a massage. When I go deep in myself to prepare to give a massage and stand at someone's head and look down at their face, and see them calmly laying there...I see only beauty...I think I see what God sees. I see what God sees in each person.

Yes...I know she is right cause I see it, too...when I visit you in hospitals, sit at someone's bed and pray with them, offer blessings...when you ask me for coffee and I look into your faces, listening, worshipfully working with you in the presence of the spirit as you seek freedom and peace...when you call me to laugh or cry or vent...I know it's true even over the phone lines...**YOU ARE LOVELY, THE APPLE OF GOD'S EYE!** You are beautiful and you already have everything you need to live the life you long to live...deep inside you...you are God's love. Each one of us is made, born knowing how to deeply and fully and freely love...and then spend a life time forgetting it or **justifying not doing it!**

~Love one another. And how do you love someone? What does love look like...

words said, things done, actions taken...not taken, not said? Some at FF shared love is when compassion is shared, when you can share without fear of judgment, it's attention given, it's when someone tells you the truth in kindness, freedom to be yourself, it's tender yet strong.

Sometimes it's easier to offer this kind of love to someone you know well. Sometimes it may be easier to offer this kind of love to someone you don't know well.

It sure is hard to offer any love to someone you see as outside of your own group, the “uncircumcised”...someone who seems to threaten your power or position or life-style or worldview... someone who challenges you to look beyond the obvious to the really real in them and in you. Hard to love the outsider.

God is the only really real...this is what I believe. And God is within each one of us...no matter our race, nationality, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation, economic status.

>*But really now...this is all so sweet...pie in the sky.* Aren't you sitting there thinking: Sounds like Eden, Karen? Then and now, God asks too much!
Love the one who threatens all I have and all I have become?
...the one who would blame me, shame me, sabotage me, blackmail me, terrify me?
Do you take me for a fool?
How can I possibility love the “uncircumcised”?

The way...the how...to love someone who is the outsider is in part revealed by how Peter shared his wisdom and his contemplative action plan to love...it is in telling the whole story of who you are, your experience, “step by step” as the scripture says...sharing the really real between two people.

It happens one on one. Jesus grew the “kindom” one person at time...not a revolution but **an evolution of human psyche and soul that is revolutionary!**

We cannot move beyond the obvious, the facts, our “stuckness” to love “the other” without hearing the real life stories behind the faces, step by step. Only real stories and personal connections, only real stories can take us beyond the headlines, beyond our assumptions, beyond our own ability to understand. Love is not an abstract. It is concrete in the moment one on one.

You already know this. You’ve already changed an assumption or wrestled with a prejudice or worldview because you had the chance or took the opportunity to know someone unlike you...personally, to know them beyond your assumptions about them.

Love one another.

I do wonder if in the end it is really hardest of all to love the ones we know the best. And after all, isn’t this where we can do the most good...*or most harm?* I don’t think we are called to like each other all the time...can’t happen. How do you love the one you know and dislike or disagree with...the one with whom you eat dinner with each night, or do homework with, or do household chores with, or figure out how to pay bills with, or run a church with, or work with?

Friends, we each have to grow up. Each of us has to really think about what we really want from life...family, coming to church, work. You have to be willing to look at yourself...your resistance to love and be loved...if you want to truly love anyone else. Anyone else. If you really want a life!

No one of us is able to love as God loves. Moment to moment we strive to love and often find ourselves not being loving. (I did it again!) But Jesus does not blame or shame. Instead he continually invites us into the next moment’s choices...free and able...a shiny apple!

The question for us then is...will I or will I not love? True love calls forth truth and courage and affection and staying alongside the other especially when it is tense.

The question for us is in today’s scripture:

~How is my response to God’s call to love hindering God
in the unfolding of heaven on earth?

~How is my

...**self-focus, exhaustion, denial, fear, laziness, schedule, blaming...hindering God?**

~How do I conduct my personal life and professional life?

***Can I pull back and look beyond the obvious**

...will I take any time to get to know anyone beyond the obvious?

*Will I look at myself in each situation to see what I am projecting?

***Will I wonder what God is doing in the life of the other
as I wonder what God is inviting me to become in the moment?**

*Will I think for myself?

Or...will I go along with the way things have always been...like those in today's lesson around Peter...like Peter himself, initially.

We are a bunch of fruits! Apples of God's eye. Maybe some bananas and oranges and pears as well. We can lighten up! And lay our burdens down! When any one of us, when our community, our country...when we are down to nothing...God is up to something!

Violence begets violence. This week, this is more plainly evident than we usually allow ourselves to realize. Don't focus on the headlines or the violence and be emptied out. This is not where our focus is to be. Our focus?

LOVE BEGETS LOVE...this is where our focus is called to be...this is where change happens. How can you love your way and this world into a very different kind of headline?

Listen for the whole story. Share yours and hear theirs.

Remember you are loved...and so are they!

Boldly be the true self you long to be in God when you are with other people.

You are beautiful!

Friends...Listen for the silence, the hush that comes over you when you hear the deepest truth spoken. This is the true invitation to love!