

The Light Is Within Me

“Knowing Ourselves...Showing Our True Selves”

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The Gospel of Mary 4: 1b-10, 5;
1 Corinthians 8: 1-13; Mark 1: 21-28
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What I know about myself is...right now...I could sure use *some courage*...to stay open and stay “in it” so I can respond in a new way to this new life of ours.

I’m thinking that being courageous is really about giving ourselves permission to be fully who we are, to let that light within guide us...to claim the wisdom already within us!

Courage is a “heart energy” that calls us to live our lives with the whole of our life’s story guiding us. Not just one aspect or story.

Wisdom is different than knowledge. It combines thinking and intuition and experience.

It has to do with seeing below the surface of things to the truth of things. The subject is often not the issue.

What is the issue, the truth of the matter?

What kind of help would really be help now?

When we see someone with courage enough to speak truth, we know it!

...like the man with the unclean spirit knew

Christ spoke truth.
And it’s not always the expected one (assumed leader or power player) but a humble one, marginalized one.

And those who are wise and speak truth, those who can really help us, they separate out our behaviors from our worth.

Our core value, worth, can sometimes become possessed by-masked by behaviors, addictions, paranoias, fear. Jesus saw this one’s true worth and called him on it.

We are not our behaviors. Truth calls us out on our choices/behaviors.

Truth wisely spoken does not use put downs, doesn’t placate, give advice, or offer a cover. Just names and invites a new response.

And...we are accountable and responsible.

We are responsible for our actions. We are responsible for the wake we create...intentionally or not. We are responsible for how our actions affect other people.

And, we can adjust our behaviors. To do so, we connect what we choose to do with who it is God has created us to be at our core, our humanity.

In other words, we respond to life from the fullness of our own and our shared humanity.

That was what Paul wanted those in Corinth to know.
Life is relational, faith is.

There was much confusion in the forming Christian community in Corinth back in the first century A.D....just like today.

One of the subjects confusing these new “Christians” centered on eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols which is an affront to Jewish cleanliness laws.

(We just heard in Mary, Jesus warn us of how laws may get in the way of peace and wholeness.)

Eating meat sacrificed to idols, that was the subject
but what was the issue beneath it Paul wants to address?

What's the real issue beneath what is confusing you, today?

Well, if you were to transport yourself back to this bustling Greek city, you would see a hub of commercial activity and religious diversity...and temples to the Greek gods.

Most people in Corinth worship the Greek Gods (and the emperor) and routinely sacrifice animals to them, and then the remainders of the sacrificial animals were sold to the meat markets for resale to the public.

If you could go to a Corinthian Burger King, your BK Broiler
might include leftovers from a sacrifice to Zeus.

This was common practice, and no one had a problem with it – no one except some of the early converts to the Christian movement.

These followers no longer worship Greek gods, and they feel their souls at risk eating meat perhaps sacrificed to a god.

They want to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ and worship God, and they sense that eating this tainted meat will make them tainted...spiritually unclean...unclean...oh, that's the word from our gospel lesson...unclean spirit...a tainted, troubled spirit.

Their fears about impurity laws are making these early Christians miserable.

And I know many of you feel miserable when you fear your spirit has been tainted by things beyond your control or by the unintended consequences of the choices you've made. Miserable.

Unclean...for you cannot find your right spirit.

Paul reminds the Corinthians that no idol in the world really exists, for there is no God but the one God known to us in the stories the Old and New Testaments.

So this is a moot point...because there are no other gods, meat can't be tainted by something that is nothing...neither can you!

But wait a second. He goes on. Even if we know eating meat can do no harm, others who do not know this can be harmed if they see us doing it.

We are to look to the effect our eating may have on those who do not see the bigger picture, or who are weak, or young, others in our families.

Left to their own "unaware" thinking, our actions may have harmful effects on them...giving the wrong impression about what we believe and what is true.

Paul is telling us to be mindful of the possible unintended harmful effects of our choices, because even if unintended, we're accountable.

...it's like when we tell an inappropriate joke that we know is wrong and we think we're telling it to a group of people who would also know, but a child hears and thinks we agree with that viewpoint and is influenced by that.

Or, like when you schedule over worship or ministry times, and so those around you think worship/belonging/caring for others don't matter to you and, ultimately, think others and faith community just don't matter.

Like when lawmakers say we don't need to wear masks, so you don't and unintentionally give someone Covid because you are asymptomatic.

Or like when you work overtime routinely & your family begins to think they don't matter. Other examples?

What we do matters...*what we imply matters.*
What we don't do matters...what it implies matters.

To eat or not to eat, to joke around or not to joke around,
to work or not to work, to show up or not show up,
this is the question.

Will your doing be your undoing?
Not so sure what to do?

Well, Paul recommends to the Christians in Corinth they make decisions based on what is most loving.

Not what you think or even think you know,
but on what is loving.

Love others enough to think twice about what you do.

Put more emphasis on love than on knowledge or worldly matters.

“Knowledge puffs up,” he reminds them, “but love builds up.” This is wisdom offered.

Love is the key, loving action, responsible acts of love.
Seem like an antiquated story?

Well.....we’re still saying...“Do what I say and not what I do.”

We still do harm over many a “subject” today...ones that may someday seem as antiquated as the Corinthian disagreement over meat sacrificed to idols.

What are today’s subjects for Christians that entangle us and set us up for doing harm...keeping us from addressing underlying issues?

Some disagree about Biblical translations and argue narrow interpretations ...often to the extent that we do harm...pushing people away from church and even away from God.
Marginalizing.

Some get caught up in exclusion based upon narrow, defensive understandings of what it means “to love humanity” such as when talking about Black Lives Matters and refunding community resources for crime prevention.

Some struggle with inclusion based upon gender, sexual orientation, race, who was here first.

Some are threatened by misguided understanding of a need for gun control misaligned with a misinterpretation of personal freedom despite the number of gun violence deaths.

Religious school vouchers, religious rights of companies vs. individuals that are employed by them, capital punishment reform have all made their way to the Supreme Court these past years, and all have been topics of religious controversy in recent years.

Eating meat seems rather harmless compared
to the damage these “subjects” may do!

False Gods and Idols today that cause us to stumble?

Hmm ...trappings of wealth, social prominence, personal security at the cost of social responsibility, cheapness masquerading as frugality, over focus on careers, our kids’ accomplishments and accolades? Prejudice parading as patriotism...a wolf in sheep’s clothing?

It’s enough to make you sick...unclean...unable to find your right spirit or your faith.

These idols/false Gods can overpower our essential goodness within and our desire to be one with each other and God.

Numbing us so we walk away from our faith’s wisdom and the power it offers us to stand

up against what is unclean and tempting us in this world...

we walk away from the light instead of follow Jesus' voice...
ironically, often just when we need wisdom and our God most!

There are times we all struggle with false gods...idolization.
Our spirits become troubled and we make trouble.

We doubt, put on false selves, have true emotional distress,
lose our way and are not invested in the guiding principle of LOVE...of God, self, others!

We do harm, intentionally or not,
to ourselves and those around us.

And Jesus sees us. Our true humanity, how we are troubled, our spirit unfree. Knowing
this, Jesus calls us out. We have a choice.

Do we, like the man in the gospel story, challenge what Jesus has to say about God and life?
In our own way, do we say:

What are you going to do about it...who do you think you are
to come in and teach with such authority?

I think often, we do just this...it's so hard to look at the truth about ourselves...we're afraid
of what we'll see. We don't want anyone to see us...our doubts, confusion, fear, reactivity!

We fear being more fully known because we think we are not enough, don't have what is
most needed now.

So, we often divert attention away from ourselves via using faulty assumptions, casting
blame, and sidestepping responsibility.

We blame...God, the church, the other political party,
protestors or rioters, family members, bosses, allow a false sense
of personal rights to justify our behaviors.

Puffing ourselves up while we're actually...covering up!

But this is now a new realm! Jesus sees right through all of that!

And He does not condemn us for it...blame us for it...judge us. What does He do instead?

Jesus sees our wondrously created core self within!

He separates out our true selves and value from our behaviors and that which is unclean
in us, tainted by the world and church of our time...and He banishes the unclean...

**effectively making space in you for a “new you”
to fill that space back up with light.**

Just when we might think Jesus would cast us aside, He keeps us close at hand and calls us to health and wholeness.

He surrounds us with church...our fellow believers who know and love us and are also doing their best to wrestle with tough issues and unclean spirits. BTW, *this is their best or they wouldn't be doing it.*

Jesus doesn't condemn us. And, we are not to condemn “others”
but rather engage them.

Ultimately it is up to us to each of us...

to be puffed up, or not...

to choose actions carefully, or not care...

to be mindful of our effect on others, or disregard them leaving
them to fend on their own...

to love ourselves and others, or not...

to be wise or not...

to eat meat, or not.

Wisdom is different than knowledge.

It combines thinking and intuition and experience.

It has to do with seeing below the surface of things to the truth of things. It is the light that shines in the darkness.

Where is the light?

It is within you.

Remind yourself of who you are?

That you are enough.

The light is within you! You are beloved.