

"Courageous Covenants of Love"

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Gospel of Thomas Sayings # 24, #34;

Genesis 9:8-17; 1 Peter 3:18-22

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Please bring to worship: 6 strips of paper and a container or clip in which to keep them throughout Lent and Easter.

So, the question is: Can we live creating possibility? Can we live "as if", "even though?" Will I live what I believe knowing I have everything already within me? ...do I even believe that?

It's a tough world out there. There are huge divides, false divisions and dichotomies. We live at time that pressures us into extremes which invite no self-reflection or nuance: democrat or republican, racist or anti-racist, teachers/families, socialism for the rich/socialism for the poor, child/adult.

What do I believe?

We don't and the world doesn't grow when our efforts center on convincing ourselves or others by being a logic bully...about faith or anything else, for that matter. Bullying doesn't convince...it denigrates through fear and intimidation. Rather, growth happens when we come alongside to understand needs and motivations...our own and that of others and then reflect that back. ...like holding up a mirror so we can see our own thoughts or they theirs...more clearly.

And, you won't be successful if doing this as a way to manipulate to get the predetermined outcome you want. It must come from a genuine desire to understand motivations and deeply listening to help each other assess and appreciate intentions and goals...rather than change them...maybe re-evaluating chosen means to choose goals.

Prompting:

The early church embraced the ancient rite of cleansing and renewal in baptism and sees it as an extension of God's covenant with Noah long ago.

The God who saved Noah through the waters, offers the same saving grace/salvation to them...to us through the waters...now baptismal waters.

Remember salvation is as a salve for what is broken within us.

Salvation is about the right ordering of things in life.

And, Paul reveals that through Jesus' baptism, and in his living and dying, Jesus goes back throughout all time to bring salvation to all those who did not know to obey and so have been imprisoned in their own hearts.

Everyone is brought forward...can save themselves.

The early church began to understand the coming of Jesus was to further the covenant established by God long ago.

He is a new sign, a personified rainbow, a living covenant.

The covenant in Jesus did not negate the covenants made with Noah, Abraham, and Moses but brings a new, radical, personal revelation of God's intention for all people.

God made a commitment long ago and now God is getting personal.

What is a covenant?

It is a promise made between two hearts...yours and God's.

We literally marked that promise on our foreheads last week...marked it with the waters of baptism and an anointing that bring new life.

Even if we do not intend or don't know how to keep our heart in the covenant, God does...and will. God holds up both ends of the rainbow, the covenant, until we hold up our end.

Paul's wisdom to live the covenant through our baptisms is to make "an appeal to God for a good conscience." Today we usually use that word, conscience, as a way to challenge our morals, ethics, and behavior.

But Jesus wasn't about teaching good morals...not even good judgment.

Jesus was about showing us that if we live each day in conscious relationship with God "as if" God/Christ/Spirit stood right behind/before/beside/above/below us...for God does,

then we stand in a powerful stream of forgiveness and grace and renewal that will help us through the day to a fuller more joy based, less fearful awestruck life.

We appeal then to God for **a holy consciousness** that frees us from...sin, yes...**but most probably from a sometimes bigger roadblock to living in grace: guilt.**

~We can't begin to deal with current situations, temptations, sin, if we are engulfed in old guilt and fear!

You see, when in guilt or fear, we aren't living "as if".

We're stuck in "What if"...which focuses us on the actions of others rather than our own actions. (Thanks Dave for this insight last week.)

Let guilt be, lay it down. Put things back in the right order. Save yourself!

Looking at all the "what if's" in which you trap yourself. When you're invited to claim your own power...with an open heart no matter how the waves may push you around...till you find your feet on solid ground.

A safe place.

We just prayed...

I am scared to let go of comforts and riches and habits and routines and prejudices and clicks and things that make life seem easier for me...even if they are false, short-lived, divisive, and even hollow. These things are familiar...like overstuffed chairs and bright lights. It is so hard to start doing things in new ways...to hang onto rainbows...to step into the darkness of the unknown even knowing you are there ahead of me, O Holy One. It's hard to live "as if"...when others sneer or would call me foolish or push back against me.

I like Lent because it calls me into a holy consciousness, a deeper soulfulness. It moves me away from the superficial.

It moves me to a more spiritual focus for my life.

I get to turn toward what has meaning (loving God's people...and myself!)

and let drop away those things that don't (perceived financial security/power struggles/tight relationships)!

I don't have to give up anything...just not give up! (Thanks Dave!)

I get to be more intentional. Less guilt! More energy to live in the realm. Be the light. Not be led by the blind.

The blind? ...those scared and not able to see fully?

You can't convince them. Logic won't do it and you know.

And be careful who you are following. Do not follow the blind, blindly.

THINK

But what you can do is...I can do...

stay alongside to shovel their driveways, hear their stories,

know their pain and hope, reflect to them what I hear so they have the opportunity to play things out one more step in their mind.

Perhaps in your caring to know them without judgement,

they discover they hadn't realized all the nuanced ramifications of the means to their end.

Perhaps they may consider a shift in their means.

And for all of us...some of our means to an end do harm to ourselves and others as we develop a kind of tunnel vision around our neediness and fear ...blinding us and limiting us in making possibility.

Actually, I think most of us have the same ends in mind...

but our fears push us to different means to reach them.

I will intentionally open my thoughts and find the light

within my teachable heart.

My heart may be a battered, bruised, worn out, full, over-joyed, tenderly held...but a teachable heart leads me...my head in my heart standing before my God who loves me.

And you know what?

The day looks bright...my soul is deep and my spirit pumping!

~And just like Jesus, I travel this life learning as I go.

~And just like Jesus, I start out from a daily baptism of grace renewed and cleansed...made able to stand up against what is not right/just in life.

~And just like Jesus, I can choose an alternative way to think and feel and act...not alone but in relationship with God and other disciples.

I guess every one of us has a choice to make.

The journey...especially the beginning of the journey...is hard.

**But we can stay on the Way, because just like Jesus,
our teachable hearts are companioned by the wisdom and strength of the Holy Spirit...heart wide open to new consciousness.**

The stories of our faith, then and now, affirm a breathtaking,
beyond-miraculous reality:

**It's not about being infallible! God or us!
It's about living a loving dynamic relationship!**

We have a God who is, indeed, willing to change,
to negotiate and re-negotiate in covenant with us,
even to become incarnate!

**May we be willing to rise above human standards
to be able to succeed by divine standards.**

Our God would rather we "fail" at first rather than
wipe situations or the whole of creation ...

no more "away with it all in a sweep of power".
It just doesn't work!

The God we worship voluntarily walks right past
the wall of our resistance and brokenness,

our stubborn and fear-based self-chosen separation.

God's covenant with us, with no escape clause, says,

“Here is what I promise about my love.
I am always with you.”

Presence is everything!

Without regard to the cost to God's self and aloneness and misery, God chooses us always!
And still promises to do just this.

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In the church, this narrative is basic:

Jesus loves us...loves you.  
Jesus shows the Way to peace.  
God gives you everything you need for the journey.  
We live “as if.”

Everything is perfect for you...to be who you are. To live “as if.”

Live the courage of your Covenant with Holiness.

You are light.

Remember you are light when... it seems so dark outside.

You can see.

Remember you are not blind when...someone wants you to stop thinking and just follow.

So, on one of your pieces of paper please fill in this question:

Even though....., I believe..... .

On the other side, please finish this intention:

I choose to life as if..... .

Keep it in a safe place as we journey through Easter.  
There is a safe place to land, to live “as if” as your faith  
brings you back to solid ground.