

“Joy In The Journey...Now!”

“Show Up Fearlessly Abiding In Holy Love”

The Gospel of Thomas Saying #25; John 15:1-11;

1 John 4:7-8, 16b-21; Acts 8:26-31, 34-38

May 2, 2021 Eastertide

Introduction to Easter worship:

Christianity is a spiritual practicum, a
chosen behavior...
our daily actions.

Easter is
“personal **crucifixion**” moving into a
corporate resurrection.

It’s not that you are saved, it’s that we
are!

We CAN put things back in the right
order!

Being Christian is about being in
relationship.

Showing up matters...how you show up
matters!

So, you will often live in the tension of
thinking differently
(let go of long held assumptions) and
living with uncertainty
(let go of outcomes to focus on process
instead of results).

The Eastertide stories call us to a “speak
truth in loving kindness relationship”
even when we mistrust situations, doubt
others, are afraid. Listening, curious to
discover nuances which may reveal
faulty thinking ...theirs and ours!
Curiosity a form of hope!

You see God is not only up to something
new in you!

God is at play in each of us...yep, even
him...her...them!

Elephant to elephant, sheep to sheep,
branches of the one vine.
And, you have a life competency for the
journey! LOVE.

Prompting:

For just one moment, try this:
Think Christian...in the
radical ways of Jesus...
it changes everything!

Hhmmn...think Christian, hey...
Have I told you recently how lovely
you are?

How wonderful you are?
How much I LOVE you?

Have I told you recently how grateful I
am that you be you?

Have I said thank you often enough,
given you credit often enough?

Have I shined light into your darkness
and noticed the light you be
shining from within your darkness?

This is me, Karen...my voice speaking to
you!

But is deeply God’s voice speaking in
me, through me to you.

God abides with me...and you! We are all One. There is no me, or you, outside of Holiness or separate from each other.

Do you realize You are Holy all the time? One in God.

So, I'm really asking...you may want to really ask:

Have I listened well enough, responded to the depth
of your questions and needs, shared insights, and gathered wisdom with you...is our
relationship growing in LOVE?

For the opportunity to be with you, let me say:

Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

Annie Lamont says this is 1 of the only 2 prayers that exist.

The other: Help me! Help me! Help me!

Actually, I think there's a third: Wow! Wow! Wow!

Maybe they are one in the same...help me and thank you and wow...honesty wrapped in gratitude.

So...

How could anyone ever tell you, you are anything
less than beautiful.

How could anyone ever tell you, you are less than whole.

How could anyone fail to notice, that your loving is a miracle...

How deeply you're connected to my soul!

We abide in each other and grow with each other. Can only thrive if we stay connected.
We are that branch, pruned for growing, greening, bearing much fruit. We are LOVE.

Let us be fearless in LOVING.

Perfecting love, casts out fear!

The commandment we have is this: those who love God fearlessly love their brothers
and sisters also. Have to for they are one and the same in LOVE. And it starts with
loving yourself so you can love others...even people you don't know!

These words of wisdom, we feel their truth deeply...

we know what's right/life giving from what's wrong/life stopping!

and yet we do "fear and fail" to love even as God loves us.

We are often afraid to really love...we fear fully loving those we know...let alone those we don't know.

Why? Why are we afraid to love...be in true, abiding relationship?
What is the punishment we fear?

...that we will lose our sense of control, our sense of security,
make ourselves vulnerable?

Do I fear loving you because you may not love me back?

Do I fear loving you because you may turn on me or use me?

Do I fear loving you because no one has ever really taught me how to love unconditionally, as Jesus loved, without my becoming a door mat?

Three powerful passages are before us this morning. They ask us to face the faith, not the facts, in living this word...
in loving this world.

Face the faith, not the fact that indeed you will be at risk if you LOVE as God would have you love,

*and yet it is only when you risk such loving,
that you will know love as never before.*

The John passage holds up for us the image of the vine and the branches...our needing each other and God's needing us.

We're in God and God is in us.

This is the source and the flow of genuine love.
Root in it, tap into it. "Get over...that...the root of LOVE.

1 John holds up this notion again using a different image:

God is love and God's love is known through us.

And, lastly, the Acts passage holds up the importance of action otherwise LOVE is nothing more than a longing and we are left alone with only a concept.

**God, in love and wisdom, has tied the success or failure
of the whole Christian experiment to the action
of the branches...us!**

God created us as LOVE, able to LOVE.

But it is up to us: we love or not...we become one with the vine or not...we companion the eunuch or not...

We can...will we?

In Acts, who is the eunuch?

He was a double outsider--not just an Ethiopian, but of color, stripped of his sexual identity.

He was despised by some for he was the treasurer.

He had power and status.

He was far outside the stereotypes of the Jewish/Christian community

...and yet he had a favorite passage which he longed to understand, and only asked,
"Can anyone guide me through this?"

What's the passage that has your attention?
Aren't we all looking for and need a guide along the way?

And the Spirit drew Philip to him as a guide.

He shared the Good News about Jesus' life and the gift of LOVE that is offered to *everyone*.

Know the story, share the story, live the story.

And Philip baptized him...actually, he did so prompted by the eunuch...a switch of roles...who now guides whom?

And, Philip baptizes honoring God's love already present within all people as they are born. Now powerfully honored with deep belonging...branch/vine.

Today, who is outcast, seeking guidance, inclusion?

Who are the outsiders Philip would baptize?

the homeless/voter ID-less, the abandoned, the addicted,
the mentally and emotionally challenged, the poor,
BIPOC people,
those alienated by religion itself?

Don't you have to believe he would baptize all who sought to understand...sought wisdom, all who professed a beginning belief (and confusion), anyone seeking guidance...

regardless of their race, their age, their sexual orientation, their gender, their ethnicity, their economic status, their political party?

We know in our heart of hearts he would have...because we all are equally loved and we all belong in God...that's the point of the Good News...

A practice of oneness in God that frees us
from prejudice, corruption,
abuse, power over...a oneness of LOVE.

But, would *we* baptize these "outsiders"?

Would *we* welcome deeply and sincerely those whom society casts aside and labels and stereotypes, who are confused and seeking guidance...or are on the other side of the false divide we create?

Society as a whole is often cruel to: Blacks, Hispanics, homeless, gay and lesbian people, the poor, the rich, republicans and/or democrats? Are we?

Society is pretty tough on:

Moody people, bossy people, whiney people, assertive people, depressed people, content people?

Are we?

We *say* we welcome all...today's eunuchs.

DO WE?
DO YOU?

We are not what we say we are...we are what we do.
Our actions define us, not our words.

Our worship experiences begin our week,

**but are nothing more than feel good moments
if we don't take them into our lives and use them**

for the things that matter most in the world.....

LOVE bringing justice and so peace to all people.
(Skills needed.)

Either we give in to fear, or we love boldly...
if you're really wanting to be Christian...this is not a choice!

And you can't do it alone...you need all of us with you.
And you have us! We are with you! Branches of that one vine.

If you are sitting here this morning and can feel your own prejudices within you, you are normal.

If you are sitting here justifying your own prejudices or hiding behind the need for them in this unsafe world of ours,
you are normal.

But you are not Christian **if** you say it's OK
to live your life by these fears and feelings.

Christians know their prejudices, name their faults,
see their hypocrisy ...and do something about them!

Being Christian isn't about believing or understanding.

It's about embracing the fullness of our humanity.
And the core of our humanity is Love Relationship...
it's our primary competency.
And it comes complete with...do-overs.

LOVING even beyond what we can understand in the moment
...loving even in our unbelief...loving doubts and all. Fears aside.

Being Christian asks us to seek God's deepest desires for all people.
Living in the tension of the common good.

Being Christian is about becoming one with God in LOVE...
grafted into the true vine.

After all, what is one without the other?
The vine without the branch?
The branch without the vine?

You know, you can get fruit trees now with 14 different varieties of apples growing on the same tree.

I think this is a good image for our changing, multicultural, inclusive church.

And it's the only way to be church.

The “oneness” God desires in the gospel is the oneness of LOVE ...and love challenges all the alienation and estrangement we direct

toward all the eunuchs of our age...
because when our prejudice and exclusion prevent LOVE...

we cut *ourselves* off that vine, whither and burn up...
burn out, give up.

We don't want to be cut off or cut others off...
but in our complacency and fear, we often do.

So, let's do something beyond our words.

Right now let's shift toward relationship.
Let us truly welcome each other this morning.
Move your tiles around. Say each other's name out loud as you do.
Unmute please. Remute.

We can welcome each person we meet this week...
talk to a eunuch,
or walk with a eunuch,
commune with a eunuch...
oh, we're all eunuchs!

Friends:
We are to show up in the all and everything of life!

Easter people show up!
Easter people know we resurrect together.
Easter people are curious and courageous.
They journey in joy...now!

Show up...you can live within uncertainty.

You can think differently expanding your repertoire of responses
for you do know yourself at least well enough
to begin to begin.

Our core competency is LOVE.

Have I told you recently how lovely you are?
How wonderful you are? How much I LOVE you?
Have I told you recently how grateful I am that you are you!
Help me. Thank you. Wow!