

Theme: We are at a threshold...a threshold time.

Right now, unlike any other time in our lifetimes, we have an opportunity to move forward differently...not to resume or assume but to cross over to a new way of being. John O'Donohue says it this way:

“At any time you can ask yourself: At which threshold am I now standing?
At this time in my life, what am I leaving? Where am I about to enter?
What is preventing me from crossing my next threshold?
What gift would enable me to do it?

A threshold is not a simple boundary; it is a frontier that divides two different territories, rhythms, and atmospheres. Indeed, it is a lovely testimony to the fullness and integrity of an experience or a stage of life that it intensifies toward the end into a real frontier that cannot be crossed without the heart being passionately engaged and woken up.

At this threshold a great complexity of emotion comes alive: confusion, fear, excitement, sadness, hope. What is your story? Not all parts of the story come gift wrapped, but all parts of the story hold wisdom for you to move forward.

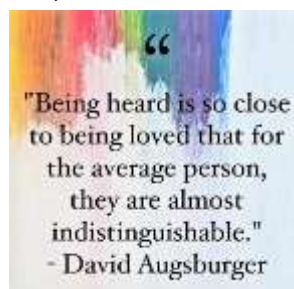
It is wise in your own life to be able to recognize and acknowledge the key thresholds:
to take your time;
to feel all the varieties of presence that accrue there;
to listen inward with complete attention until you hear the inner voice calling you forward.

The time has come to cross.”

When you begin to gain insight honoring from where you have come, honoring what has worked well already, and awakening to what is needed now....

you begin to get glimpses of what can be. You see the threshold.

And often what helps us move forward, is the sense of being heard, valued, loved.



We hear each other into life.

This is a threshold time and this is a sanctuary space in which we offer belonging to each other, hear each other, Holy love each other and appreciate each other's wisdom. Here, you can try on being that new human being Jesus invites us to become...perhaps fail at first, but then try again.

Grace invites us to move forward into this threshold moment

We cross the threshold as we embrace the fullness of our life stories and all the wisdom they hold. And we find, so often, hope comes from the very place the hurt comes.

Music video.

Background for prayer:

The story of Job is a perplexing one, especially hearing it against a backdrop of our theme. Job, a good person of integrity, is thrust into miserable circumstances through no fault of his own. But Job never falters in his conviction "God is good"...even while wrestling with God.

Job is so confident in God's companionship, he hauls God into court seeking an explanation. He feels secure enough in his relationship with God to be fully honest with God. Job is a model of right relationship with God...honest, tough, thoughtful, principled, seeking, repentant, open.

In response, God shows him the glory of the universe thus inviting him to gain a different perspective while not dismissing his complaints.

Job's story puts an end to the older wisdom that the good are blessed and the bad cursed. It's more complicated than that! There are no simple answers.

Bad stuff happening is not necessarily direct cause and effect. Here's the thing: God doesn't punish and doesn't play favorites. Job is a story set up on a faulty premise but making important points.

Ahead of Mark reading:

Talk the new understanding of adultery from Shirley Paulson...reformed and reforming.

We're At A Threshold!

"Awe Before The Law!"

Mark 10:2-16, Psalm 26, Job 1:1, 2: 1-10
October 3, 2021

Bet you're wondering if I'm gonna deal with the divorce issue today. Yes, it's a part of the story, but just a part.

It's the subject for sure because the Pharisees brought it up to try once again to trick Jesus,

and framed marriage the way they did. But, what's the issue beneath this subject that Jesus is addressing?

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In its day, this teaching of Jesus on divorce is a huge step forward in the rights of women and for children and families, and even for men

...for where one is artificially held down, one is being artificially held up...both pay a price...

albeit the one being held down pays quicker and more intensely!

Jesus is teaching just and right relationships for all.

Today's lesson is not a teaching on divorce.

This teaching uses divorce as a springboard to remind us

God intends for all of us to live in just relationship with each other.

That means looking within, holding everyone to the same expectations and invitations, opening our hearts through grace.

And realize,

the law does not define what is right and life-giving...

we are to rise above a law

which sets forth a minimum rather than a maximum  
of integrity and justice for us!

We are called to right relationships that are just and called to commit ourselves to them.

Yet, we all know there are times when Jesus calls us to leave relationships because they are harmful or abusive or unloving...

"cut it off/tear it" out from last week's scripture lesson.

Jesus is calling us to a higher standard than what  
may be culturally or legally allowed.

**God calls us to live our lives beyond what laws expect of us. Laws don't bring justice, people do!**

**It's awe...not law...**

**we are to aspire to and ascribe to in our lives!**

Perhaps reflect on this at this threshold moment:



And...

Isn't it amazing how if the sin...the failing, the mistake...isn't yours, it's much easier to condemn it?

Isn't it amazing what we perceive as our failings and what we let escape our attention and fall off our radar screen?

Isn't it amazing how we use someone else's "failings" as a way to keep them out... out of our lives and responsibilities and even out of our churches...

use "sin" as a way to keep people out rather than bring them in...

resisting seeing how our own "sin" ...  
our own failings and mistakes make us all

much more alike  
than we are different?

Forgetting the church is a place for the broken who have eyes to see and ears to hear and a deep desire for more in their lives.

If any of us is to walk in integrity with our God we must see our own failings, mistakes, shadows...

realizing God's emphasis is not on our "sinfulness"  
**but on our awareness.**

A God who calls us to turn our lives around, re-turn...  
and truly live free and able...

calls us not because we are sinless, but because  
we are not hopeless/lost causes.

Holiness sees our losses, griefs, loves, lives  
through a very different intention than we often hold  
for ourselves and others.

Holiness does...because God is gracious, loves each of us so much  
just as we are, and wants good things for all of us!

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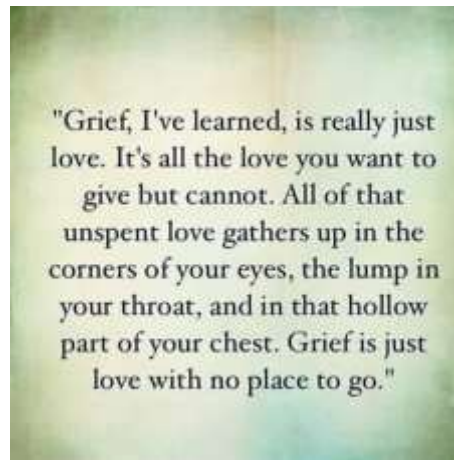
Job confidently looks beyond circumstances to find meaning in his life...
a meaning based in right relationship with God.

The psalmist finds himself on "level ground" in his life...a time when he is able to
look within and walk with integrity and resist evil-doers and hypocrites...

seeking to be redeemed during moments of self-awareness and inner courage. He
was scared. He grieved.

He was at a threshold and chose to cross over...using his faith and personal
relationship with God in his real life...as his assurance.





And the Pharisees?

It was a man's world. It was against a backdrop of extreme patriarchy Moses gave a new instruction.

Just as an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth was a huge step forward in the justice world of the Old Testament,

Moses' decree requiring a man to have a certificate of divorce was a huge step forward in its time.

It allowed a process, time for the woman.

Previously, men could divorce their wives...of whom they had many...divorce for any reason, at any moment,

and she had no recourse...and often nowhere to go, belong.

Women could be charged with adultery.

Men were not charged.

Women and children were as property.

There was no just relationship, no mutual value, no rights...in the law.

Moses said there must be a process and a reason...
and a woman declared free.

Jesus' called this a step forward because our hearts were hardened...

stuck, frozen as if what is legal or culturally acceptable, is what is right.

A first step but only a first step.

There's a threshold to cross!

Jesus recalls at creation God's intention of mutuality, respect, relationship...making male and female, the feminine and masculine within each...making all people equals in God's sight.

This is God's deepest desire for us...just relationships of mutual respect and dignity.

The Pharisees framed this as a man and woman. But this teaching of Jesus' is not limited to male-female relationships. Or limited to marriage relationships!

To tear apart a relationship is indeed painful to God and to us. There are few good reasons to do so... but there are reasons... as Jesus pointed out in last week's lesson:

no relationship, no habit, no mind-set or choice should ever be allowed to rot our lives and kill us off and bring us to a hellish existence...separation, isolation.

This is outside of God's intention for our well-being.

Jesus says respond to such situations. Don't endure them. Suffering is not the point.

Nothing can keep us from God and the fullness of life except our own denial of the way things are and then continuing to choose poorly!

The story goes on, with the disciples, Jesus surpasses Moses' understanding and calls forth yet another huge step forward in justice... do unto others as *you would have* them do unto you.

Saying both men and women can divorce but neither one can do so on their own, or else it is nothing more than adultery.

Just as it takes two to be in relationship, it takes two to go out of relationship... a conversation (in non-abusive relationships).

Such a decision is no small thing and cannot be made by one party outside of conversation with the other...without mutual agreement.

Jesus elevates women's value and their God given right to be on an equal plane with men.

And for the second time in just a few chapters, Jesus follows teachings on right relationships between adults with an invitation to treat children with the same dignity and respect with which we ought to treat adults.

Right relationship...our heavenly lives depend upon it. Jesus says so.

Know: power-over, manipulation in relationship is often a mask for our sadness...pain that has nowhere to go and so comes out as anger...or depression.

Hope feels blocked, we "act out" at the other, and the suffering (of both parties) takes on a life of its own.

We know from the teachings of Jesus this is not God's desire for any of us...to suffer...faith isn't about enduring suffering.

Faith is about reframing our suffering....
seeing it differently.

Perhaps today's lesson is about how we can reframe suffering, the suffering in an adult world of problems....reframe it with a child-like faith... seeing thresholds of possibilities.

What differentiates the faith of a child and that of adults?

What are the qualities of a child-like faith?

Children are...Trusting. Dependent. Vulnerable. Playful. Direct.

Yes. But all these qualities lead to one thing:

Kids aren't defensive...they move on
expecting something good to happen next.

They don't expect pain and so they haven't built up walls...walls of ideas and resistance...
walls around situations...to keep pain out...
but end up also keeping joy out!

And so, children remain open

to a new thing happening,
to good coming from bad,
to new approaches to every situation,
to asking new questions of life.

WOW!!!

It never would occur to a child that it is anyone's intention that they suffer.

**They do not blame, they engage life. They look to life.
They cross over!**

It's so hard for adults.
We carry grudges.
We vow never to get burned again.
We keep asking the same old questions of life
over and over again.

We spin our wheels and get angrier and angrier.
We blame and shame.

No possibility of a threshold moment.

**What makes it so difficult is that to be child-like
we have to unlearn being adult-like.**

We adults often have to unlearn something in order
to learn something new.

~The disciples had the idea that Jesus was going to be a David-type king. They had to unlearn that.

~They thought the people clamoring around Jesus needed to be kept away or brought to order. They had to unlearn that.

~They thought that Jesus came to free them to live in their own land. They had to unlearn that...Jesus came to offer freedom within your own life.

They had to unlearn so they could learn a new thing
and a new approach to life.

*What do you have to unlearn in order to come to life
less defensively with a curious and open mind?

What are you defensive about......your weight, your right to have things, your right to be the boss at home, your right to remain non-committal, your right to take care of others, your right to be angry, to leave or stay...who can stay or has to leave?

We've become so complicated.

Perhaps we need to focus less on what we've learned,
how we've been burned,
and focus more
on how to use our child-like, Holy imaginations
as we approach life.

Remembering our challenges and losses and triumphs...the whole of our story...perhaps we are called to imagine a new response to what's happening now
...a new way to be in what's happening.

It's curiosity and hope...it's imagination, not education,
that gets us through the suffering, the problems.

And education and therapy may help you see what you have to unlearn, but how do
begin to newly learn, cross the threshold of possibility?

You start
by seeing yourself differently...
the way God does. Think on that...you can be different!

It begins by imagining life can be different...
This a spiritual approach to life.
It's a salty leap of faith.

Life is not to be managed, but enjoyed.
Awe over the law...the usual intellectualized ways
which enculturate, saturate, inundate us.

**Can you imagine a different life in the life you have?*

Maybe begin by imaging Jesus...imagining Jesus in your life, standing by you in
the midst of the problem...
as you are tempted to argue, to defend with selfish pride, to divorce yourself from
people, literally and figuratively.

*How would you respond differently to your life
if Jesus was right beside you?*

It's tough to think of Jesus standing there while you are "acting out" as an adult isn't it?

Then begin by imagining yourself on Jesus' lap or walking along together...sensing...

*He wants my life to be full of the joy of a child,
to be just, to be full of trust in the providence of God moment to moment.*

God's timing and your timing come together.

God's deepest longing for you and your longing for yourself meet in daily relief and freedom.

You are free to imagine a different life for yourself.
Jesus says so. God wants it for you.

Jesus is calling us to be impish children, not well-behaved by adult standards.
Fully engaged.

Jesus is calling us to come and to trust and to be open to **new solutions to old problems**
by letting down our defenses long enough
to ask a different question of life
and find a new answer, an unexpected one.

Are you angry, suffering? Your faith in pain?

Take two children to play, and call God in the morning.

Think back to look forward
as you approach today's thresholds.

What is one piece of
wisdom you have
gained as you walk
your path?

WARRIOR GODDESS

Jesus comes for times such as these!

“At any time you can ask yourself:
At which threshold am I now standing?
At this time in my life, what am I leaving?
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What is preventing me from crossing my next threshold?
What gift would enable me to do it?”

