

Crossing Over to Loving Kindness

“Convinced”

2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18; Luke 18:9-14
November 7, 2021

This is the time of year: an invitation to let go, let go of fear.

As the leaves' true colors appear, the trees bare themselves with no regret. No regret. And we come to understand something marvelous of ourselves and life's eternal cycles. So much more life is possible....*yet!*

So much more is possible, even in these times in which we feel we are falling apart, falling down, falling over, falling for the wrong stuff. If we fall hard enough, we may just get to that place within where we have no choice but to...

fall to our knees. Our truer selves laid open, calling us to cross over...cross over into kindness even though the world invites us to withdraw, defend, deny, react.

Calling us to cross over the great divide between what “is” and what “is yet” possible.

Crossing over into loving kindness...of self, others, this gorgeous world of ours...just as we are, they are, the world is. Ripe with possibility!

We are to embody loving kindness and trust in the “more”. And boldly! There is nothing timid about autumn. It's

daring trusts that which is needed most will come.

We let go of our fears...facing the world with kindness instead of anger, discouragement, hopelessness, or a well-planned defense.

If not now, when?

(My head up, hands up, like the Pharisee):

Oh God, thank you! I am not like these others!

I can stand and say I go above and beyond

what others are doing.

None of their stuff ever brushes off on me! No!

I am not like these others...ordinary people!

Surely, You see....and my place in heaven, a high one!

(My head down, alone, quietly, like the tax collector):

God, be merciful to me. You know, and I know, I am a sinner! Thank you, Lord, for listening.

Help me as I leave this place enabled with your wisdom and encouragement to go back into my life.

The hearers of today's gospel story would have expected Jesus to lift up the Pharisee, not the tax collector.

~We don't expect the model for us to be an ordinary person who works at life, either.

We, too, expect it to be the extraordinary person who skates through life seemingly having it all together...cause we want to have it all together....want someone to have it all together!

A delusion...that anyone has it all together, that anyone is better than anyone else, especially in the eyes of the Divine!

Indeed those who heard Jesus tell this story would have been shocked!

But then again, did you catch to whom Jesus is speakinghe told this story to some who

“trusted in themselves” ...who thought themselves “righteous” and regarded others with “contempt”.

He speaks to those who are self-righteous, not right with God, but right with their own agendas.

**Well defended as to what they want and do,
and who see others as they want to see them,
rather than as they really are. Sound familiar?**

Let's go back to Paul's letter to Timothy.

Paul also talks about being righteous.

He talks about God judging both the living and the dead in terms of righteousness.

Thing is...God's judgment isn't about punishing...or rewarding for that matter!

God's judgment is about seeing clearly what is and so then having a chance to do life over again.

To be righteous in God's sight is to be right with God's deepest desires for you and for the good of all – at the same time!

Even just longing for it moves you toward righteousness.

...your own good and the good of all are not opposites, but one with each other...a sign of being right with God.

Seeing clearly, we are to...as Paul says...

we are to be persistent proclaiming the message

whether the time is favorable or not. Pour ourselves out!

Not emptying ourselves out, pouring ourselves out.

And, to encourage those who are doing the rebuking with the utmost patience in teaching them...

not judging them, or punishing them, or labeling them!

Not holding it against them.

Rather, being courageous with them.

Be sober...clear thinking, endure. Walk humbly with our God...with each one and all of us!

Paul goes on to say if this is your ministry, you will find yourself at times standing alone with no one coming to your support, deserted at times.

You will feel like you're in the lion's mouth as others will attack you to get you to go quiet or look the other way
or do the easier thing

rather than the often what is hard but enduring.

Paul says God is with us and brings us courage to endure this harsh reality.

And if you've ever been about truth telling with the intention of doing good, whether in your family, or work, or here,

then you know something about the lion's mouth...

and how surviving is totally dependent on Divine presence with you in that lion's mouth....

not rescuing you, but being with you - in the lion's mouth!

Living into righteousness...which is not about being right but getting it right - seeking justice and mercy for all.

Which begs the question...how do you know?

How do you know if you are right with God versus
being self-righteous?

Jesus gives us an amazing clue in the Lucan reading:

you can tell by the humility you feel...or don't...

around the issue at hand.

The word humility comes from the root word which means of the earth (hummas, adam, humanity)...of the earth, getting the right size.

If we are humble...well, then just like Goldilocks....one way is too big, one is too small, and one way of being who we are....is just the right size!

Humble is being the right size. Not puffed with your own agendas, worth, justifications for your actions.

Humble is being the right size. Not cowering, not a doormat, not blindly accepting or shrinking from our responsibility.

Not sure. Still not sure?

Are you thinking...I'm not sure I am humble?

...not sure I am right with God rather than self-righteous?

Do you feel contempt?

Do you feel contempt about a situation or a person or a community?

...feeling someone or something is below you, worthless, deserves what they are getting?

Do you despise others...which moves your feelings into wishing harm or undermining or getting even?

You know, as I was looking up the word contempt in the dictionary, it struck me that it follows the words contemplate and contemporary.

If we are contemplative (meditating on the holy in the midst of life) and contemporary (able to be in the moment),
I don't think you can *feel* contempt.

If you are feeling contempt in some part of your life...more likely you call it disgust, disregard, getting even...lived out as sabotaging, undermining, ignoring, demeaning...

If your self-talk is about convincing yourself that you're right and they are wrong...that's contempt!

You have fallen out of life's tippe-canoe, and you're all wet...you may be drowning whether you know it or not.

Jesus is throwing you a life preserver today.

And we are here to reach out our hand to you to help you get back in the tippe-canoe with all the rest of us soggy believers.

I think most of us, when we look into the mirror...
see our reflection in the eyes of God,
see the tax collector in us...we see easily those places and times when mercy is needed
and we want to live "out" of it.

But...also, there are times when we look in the mirror, sickened to see the face of the
Pharisee looking back at us.

But for this, give God thanks and praise! You can see!
YOU CAN SEE clearly what is and that makes new life possible, the fall worth it!

What is of concern are the times...I look,
and She (the pharisee) is there, and I don't see her.

The mirror has two faces.

May we look and see reflected back to us our true selves so we can claim the grace/do-overs God invites us to take!

May our faith in speaking "truth in kindness" here in this community, help us see ourselves rather than blurring our focus on others.

May the community help us understand it is not the reflection/judgement that matters but what we do with what we see and now know that counts.

For it is only when we humbly admit to ourselves
and to our God that the image in the mirror is distorted, broken....that we have
misjudged,
missed the mark in our lives...
it is only then we can then deeply appreciate who we are,
the opportunities we have in God to do it over again,
and so touch the lives of others as we do.
We can cross over!

The tax collector does not only ask for mercy, he receives it...he repents turning his life around. It is intentional.
Heaven on earth.

You do not drift into shalom, but rather work intentionally in the faith at creating space for God's healing and wholeness to touch your life and enter this world.

We do not drift into shalom, we set sail, row our tippe-canoe hard for it! We cross over into loving kindness.

So, what if you started the day this way...

1. As you get up and go to brush your teeth in the morning, look into the mirror. Get very close to it...it's OK if it makes you feel silly and you see yourself smile. Maybe that's God smiling at you!

Acknowledge your desire to be loved and accepted and happy. Acknowledge your pain.

As you look into your own eyes, see there the eyes of the Divine beholding you.

Imagine all the mirrors in the world with those eyes looking back. Remember we all want the same thing and we are all connected.

2. Stand there. Force yourself to stand there as a prayer. Breathe in cherishing yourself as God cherishes you. And breathe out cherishing others.

Let go of the preconceptions and judgments you have about people, and see them as God does...see yourself in them as well. You understand them better than you might like to admit!

If the faces of people with whom you are having difficulty appear, be thankful you realize it and lift them up and appreciate them just the way they are.

For they are on a faith journey, too.

Acknowledge this reality: God is doing something in them just as God is doing something in you.

3. During the day, every time you see a mirror, remember your pharisee and tax collector. Cherish them.

4. During the day, see mirrors everywhere and extend that attitude of kindness to everyone you meet: to the grocery clerk, your family, co-workers, facebookers.

5. Stay in the practice no matter what happens.

6. At night, as you see your reflection in the mirror once again, give God thanks and ask God that you may see yourself the way God does...beautiful, whole, precious, loved, just the right size.

See yourself with loving kindness.

Your day begins and ends with you...within God.

You are the source of contempt or delight. ...humility or self-righteousness. ...joy or depletion.

Cross over.

Reflect delight.

Reflect humility.

Reflect joy.

Reflect what you truly believe and know:

God is with you no matter where you are
on your faith journey.

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