

“Freeing Jesus: Our Teacher”

Psalm 27:1, 7-11; John 15:10-17

2nd Sunday of Lent

Message for March 13, 2022

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In Psalm 27, David reveals his life - a life of storms and turmoil and brokenness. But through all the upheaval, David's life is lived in light of his relationship with the God who made him, taught him, and sustained him. David's is not a life in a sheltered garden. Like our lives, it is full of circumstances that raise fears, worries and doubts; revealing to us the many things we do not know or understand.

David says to God, “Teach me your way.” What and how are we being taught?

Richard Rohr points out that love and suffering are ways of knowing. He writes, “in the practical order of life, if we have never loved deeply or suffered deeply, we are unable to understand spiritual things at any depth.... Even God must use love and suffering to teach you all the lessons that really matter. They are [God's] primary tools for human transformation.”

The West (our society) tends to be Dualistic, which makes it difficult for us to be in full relationship with God, with ourselves, and with each other. Often, we navigate an either/or existence. If instead we could perceive and live in a non-dualistic way, we would be better equipped to embrace the complexity and nuances of our lives and of the world. We might instead embrace all that is happening rather than ignoring the parts that don't align with a particular belief or idea that we are carrying around with us.

Rohr observes that when we are experiencing new love, we often go through a “honeymoon phase,” where there is no time for picking fights or being irritated by nonessentials. We overlook offenses and readily forgive.

He also notes that the same is true in a time of great grief - you enter a unitive mind as tragedy and loss seem to put everything in perspective. You have no time or interest in picking fights, you recognize the small things that are a joy or are healing. You are transformed, you are reconfigured -

your heart is tenderized through sadness, depression, and grief and is more capable of compassion, patience, and even love.

Rohr writes, “Love and suffering lead us toward the beginnings of a contemplative mind if we submit to them at all, and many of us do submit to them for a while. Too often, though, most of us soon return to dualistic inner argumentation and our old, tired judgments, trying to retake control.”

It is through practice that we break through that tendency to fall back on our old ways. In order to shift out of dualistic thinking, we need a regular discipline of contemplation and prayer, in order to “rewire” our thinking and knowing.

In the Gospel reading from John today, we heard, “Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.” This is the beginning of the second half of John’s Gospel. The public teaching of Jesus has been completed, and now for several chapters Jesus focuses exclusively on teaching “his own” — his disciples — and trying to prepare them for what is to come.

The statement that “he loved them to the end” is striking. The end (*telos* in Greek) could mean “end” in the sense of conclusion or termination, or “end” in the sense of goal, aim, or fulfillment. John always brings multiple layers of meaning to his text, so maybe both meanings are intended. Jesus loved his disciples to the very end of his earthly life and ministry, and he loved them fully and completely, without condition or reservation.

As we witness Jesus washing his disciples’ feet, we come to realize how incredible this act was. Not only was Jesus, who “had come from God and was going to God,” completing a humble task, he also already knew that these people were going to fail him at the moment when he needed them most.

Jesus told them that they were to serve one another in the same way that he served them. “If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you should do as I have done to you” (13:14-15).

This specific example takes us back to our discussion last week from John’s chapter 15, with Jesus’s commandment to love. Jesus’ commandment to

love one another is not a commandment to feel affection, but a commandment to act in a loving way, even when we would rather do otherwise.

Certainly, we all have countless experiences of teachers explaining the rules and teaching us how to behave. In this case, Jesus instructs us on how we should treat people and how to follow him. Yet, it goes beyond instruction. Jesus did not just teach love, he lived love. He modeled for all of us the embodiment of love and the way of life that aligns with that embodiment of love. It is not just about *doing*, but also about *being*.

Although we all have our own experiences and perceptions of teachers, we know, even just through hearing the many parables with which Jesus taught, that he was teaching more than rules and regulations, morals, and expectations. Jesus taught from the heart. In washing the feet of his followers, he was embodying the very teachings he had been sharing with them all along.

Maybe you have been lucky enough to have a teacher who taught from the heart. They ask questions rather than just imposing their ideas and answers on you. They invite you into the conversation and encourage deep thinking and reflection. They are hospitable and generous. They recognize the potential for transformation rather than just engaging in a transaction of information.

When you think about this approach, I imagine there might be a particular teacher that is coming to mind for you - someone who nurtured a way of being in the world, a way that honors critical thinking and encourages questions, a hunger for learning and a love of words.

These are the aspects of Jesus's teaching, as well. And when we are interacting with one another in these loving and transformational ways, we are honoring God within us and within other people.

May we become teachers and learners who are capable of non-dualistic thinking that focuses on *being* as well as *doing*. Amen.