

Jesus And The Love of God

The last two weeks we have been up in the Galilean Hills with Jesus and his disciples. We sat with him as he taught. “Put God first in your lives that you may do well.” “Don’t worry about having enough” “Don’t chase down things, stay with God” Rev. Bill summed it up correctly: “Give”! Last week we also sat with Jesus as he taught us to depend on God, first, no matter what our neighbors think. Rev. Elizabeth told us to take Noah as a guide in this, who would not be dissuaded from the word of God, the word that told him to build a huge boat when there was no water to float it. And, surprise, God was right. The rain and floods came. Some people in Western Washington these days may think God was right, too.

Now we jump ahead two chapters. We have come down out of the hills, crossed the Sea of Galilee with Jesus and crossed it again. We are outside of Jesus’ hometown of Capernaum, walking along with him and his disciples. We pass the tax office. Jesus calls out to the tax collector, Matthew, “Follow me” Matthew gets up, not only follows him, but, opens up his home to him. He invites all his fellow tax collectors and some of their hirelings and hangars-on to dinner with Jesus. We are not surprised when the strict theologians and moral guides of the day, the Pharisees, show up. They ask the disciples, (*sneakily*) “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

Well, you can’t put one over on Jesus. He has mighty sharp ears. Hears the question. Time for a lesson in real time. Those classes up in the hills were think pieces. Twelfth grade. We’re down out of the hills in real life. Havin’ a party. This is for real. And the intimidating Pharisees are at it again. Jesus uses them to make a point about life after school, “Those who are well have no need for a physician, but those who are sick. Go and be learning what this means”. Literally, be learning and go on learning every day. Study what will make life worth while:

Two things: I am not here to heal you Pharisees or your people. You already have it so right you can’t see beyond the law. You are all tied up in it. I am here to heal these, the broken ones. They desperately need to find the one who will make them whole.

But the next words of Jesus may finally get in the ears of the Pharisees. He quotes the Bible. He quotes Hosea.

Hosea is a unique prophet in this: he fully understands what it means to change the way you see God and the people around you. He got it that it is not enough to live as everyone else lives, to make mistakes, and then to go and make amends with God, to offer sacrifices and expect to be right with him. Hosea said this doesn’t work in the economy of God. You must first be loyal to God in all things. For “loyalty” he uses the Hebrew word *hesed* [*chesed*]. It is translated “steadfast love” in our

reading today. Trust him fully for your life then live fully within his knowledge, his wisdom. He sees the lack of this loyalty to God to be the source of Israel's grand deceit. She is adulterous in her seeking of Baal and the things of Baal. Some suggest Hosea finds this grand metaphor, the whoredom of Israel he call it, in his own life story. Perhaps the faithlessness of a wife who he, tellingly, refuses to divorce. No one uses violent word pictures as Hosea does. Yahweh is "pus to Ephraim", "rotteness to the house of Judah"* God is your husband, be not whores, but faithful ... or you lose this source of life itself.

Jesus takes this instruction and gives it even more power: Finally, he says to the Pharisees, and us: God desires the same compassionate, steadfast love from us that he himself grants. It is in his mercy that we do find this love. Then we will be learning and go on learning. It is nothing we do, nothing we sacrifice, or otherwise attempt, that will bring us into his loving presence.

Dan Siegel, in his books on mindfulness, makes the point very well. We can train our minds to rest in this presence. To be still and receive remarkable wisdom that we can trust for all of our lives.

I count it as a delight that within this congregation itself, we have so many who are practicing, in one way or another, this powerful tool. They are learning to access the deepest strengths of the Spirit of God within.

We all get a fresh infusion of this new life each time we join in the eucharist that is so central to our worship. When we are surrounded by the holy music that transforms our lives. When we listen deeply to the Word of God. It is the sacred presence of our Lord in each of us.

It is never done, friends, this learning. We never graduate from it. It happens effectively only in the compassionate love we are learning from being in the company of Jesus. Even so come Lord Jesus.

*Wolff, page xxv

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Sent to blog: Reflecting on the meaning of the gospel message for Sunday:

An African-American congressman tells the story of how his parents always reminded him vav segregation "don't get in the way" and "it's the way it is". However this congressman has learned that the only way to make progress for the issues he cares about is to "get in the way". I think when Jesus goes to Matthew's party he is getting in the way of all those who would destroy life rather than save it. I want to stay in his company and "get in the way" of prejudice and injustice wherever he leads me.