

Sermon Notes 14th Sunday of Pentecost

“Graft in our hearts the love of your Name...

“nourish us with all goodness; and bring forth in us the fruit of good works...” BCP p 233

[Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9](#)

[James 1:17-27](#)

[Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23](#)

Every week we begin our worship with a greeting of the faithful and a prayer which gathers together --- “collects” --- the thoughts of a specific Sunday. Sometimes the prayer reflects an ancient prayer, occasionally the prayer feels contemporary, resonating with this moment, and often we listen, but without the second ear that directs our attention to how the Spirit might move us this day. What is it that nourishes us, or leaves us filled with spite and ill thoughts? We all have those mean thoughts about others or even ourselves Jesus says, and not even a magic ceremony can wash away what was coming from within our own hearts. Both the Letter of James and the Gospel reading from Mark acknowledge the difficulty we have in focusing on goodness.



Mikhail Reva, Odessa Children's Hospital, Ukraine, 21st century

This week in the gospel of Mark we hear Jesus challenge the idea that ritual practices are what bring us close to God. Once again Jesus changes the question for the people who are listening. It is not what you eat—or we might even add swallow—it is rather what comes from the heart that affects our relationship with God. It is what we say aloud and our own malice and mean intentions that turn us away from the good, both personally and systemically. Why does this matter? It matters because it is the discipline of watching over our hearts, turning to goodness, generosity and kindness that enable us to become deep listeners of God's good Word and gives us the power to care for others.

We do not practice the discipline of faithfulness to God alone. We practice exercising kindness and generosity to one another, to our children and family—and most importantly to the stranger, and the vulnerable. In the Letter of James it is the practice “to care for orphans and widows in their distress” (James 27). The ten Commandments Jesus reminds us, are a gift, a way to behave toward family and stranger alike. We are not owed some goodness for what we do, we are being asked to respond to God's goodness with generosity toward others. And how is this possible asks James? Ask God for help. Christ in us changes the very hearts that can separate us from each other.



Leonardo da Vinci,

The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne and John the Baptist

Conscious Love, How We Love

How we relate to someone we love... provides an extremely clear and accurate mirror of how we relate to ourselves—John Welwood [1]

Authentic love is of one piece. How you love anything is how you love everything. Jesus commands us to “Love our neighbors as we love ourselves,” and he connects the two great commandments of love of God and love of neighbor, saying they are “like” one another (Matthew 22:39). So often, we think this means to love our neighbor with the same amount of love—as much as we love ourselves—when it really means that it is the same Source and the same Love that allows each of us to love ourself, others, and God at the same time! That is unfortunately not the way most people understand love, compassion, and forgiveness—yet it is the only way they ever work. *How you love is how you have accessed Love.*

We cannot sincerely love another or forgive offenses inside of dualistic consciousness. Try it, and you'll see it can't be done. Many pastors and priests have done the people of God a great disservice by preaching the Gospel to them but not giving them the tools whereby they can obey that Gospel. As Jesus put it, “cut off from the vine, you can do nothing” (John 15:5). The “vine and the branches” offer one of the greatest Christian mystical images of the non-duality between God and the soul. In and with God, I can love everything and everyone—even my enemies. Alone and by myself, my willpower and intellect will seldom be able to love in difficult situations over time. Many folks try to love by willpower, with themselves as the only source. They try to obey the second commandment without the first. It usually does not work long-term, and there is no one more cynical about love than a disillusioned idealist. (This was my own youthful generation of the 1960s.)

Finally, of course, there is a straight line between love and suffering. If we love anyone or anything deeply and greatly, it is fairly certain we will soon suffer because we have given up control to another, and the price of self-extension will soon show itself. Undoubtedly, this is why we are told to be faithful in our loves, because such long-term loyalty and truly conscious love will always lead us to the necessary pruning (John 15:2) of the narcissistic self.

Until we love and until we suffer, we all try to figure out life and death with our minds; but afterward a Larger Source opens up within us and we “think” and feel quite differently: “until knowing the Love, which is beyond all knowledge” (Ephesians 3:19). Thus, Jesus would naturally say something like, “This is my commandment: you *must* love one another!” (John 13:34). Authentic love (which is always more than a heart feeling) initially opens the door of awareness and aliveness, and then *suffering for that love* keeps that door open for mind, body, and will to enter. I suspect for most of us that is the work of a lifetime.

References:

[1] John Welwood, *Love and Awakening: Discovering the Sacred Path of Intimate Relationship* (HarperPerennial: 1996), xiii.

Adapted from [Richard Rohr: Essential Teachings on Love](#), eds. Joelle Chase and Judy Traeger (Orbis Books: 2018), 206-207, Center for Action and Contemplation Sunday, June 16, 2019

Love in Service of Transformation

Cynthia Bourgeault, an Episcopal priest and one of the Center's core faculty members, calls Jesus' teaching and way of life “the path of conscious love.” She writes:

“Conscious love” . . . emphasizes the life-affirming and implicitly relational nature of the path, and the word “conscious” makes clear that the touchstone here is transformation, not simply romance. Conscious love is “love in the service of inner transformation”—or if you prefer, “inner transformation in the service of love.” Either way, this is exactly what Jesus was about. [1]

The words “conscious love” ring true for me (Richard) as a definition for our life's purpose and the goal of all spirituality. When we're conscious, we will always do the loving thing, the connecting thing, the intimate thing, the communion thing, the aware thing. To do the unloving thing is always to somehow be unconscious at that moment. Cynthia describes what this means:

The first requirement of conscious love is, of course, that it has to be *conscious*—or in other words, anchored in a quality of our presence deeper than simply egoic selfhood. Nowadays we would identify this quality of consciousness as unitive, or nondual, awareness. . . .

For Jesus as for all teachers of conscious transformation . . . the work with a partner is in service of this goal. It is not intended simply to fulfill physical or emotional needs, but to accelerate the process of awakening. [2]

The Buddhist psychologist John Welwood (1943–2019) wrote:

Instead of looking to a relationship for shelter, we could welcome its power to wake us up in areas of life where we are asleep and where we avoid naked, direct contact with life. This approach puts us on a path. It commits us to movement and change, providing forward direction by showing us exactly where we most need to grow. Embracing relationship as a path also gives us a practice: learning to use each difficulty along the way as an opportunity to go further, to connect more deeply, not just with our partner, but with our own aliveness as well.

By contrast, dreaming that love will save us, solve all our problems or provide a steady state of bliss or security only keeps us stuck in wishful fantasy, undermining the real power of love—which is to transform us. For our relationships to flourish, we need to see them in a new way—as a series of opportunities for developing greater awareness, discovering deeper truth, and becoming more fully human. [3]

That's why I believe deep friendships, family, sexual intimacy, marriage, and even celibacy are not given to us to solve our problem, but actually to reveal the problem. All of these life stances show us that we still don't know how to love. At the same time, if we are conscious and aware, they give us the daily practice and opportunity to try one more time! [4]

In summary, Welwood wrote:

A conscious relationship is one that calls forth who you *really* are. . . . Regarding relationship as a vehicle or path that can help two people access the powerful qualities of their true nature provides the new vision our age so urgently needs. [5]

References:

[1] Cynthia Bourgeault, [The Meaning of Mary Magdalene: Discovering the Woman at the Heart of Christianity](#) (Shambhala: 2010), 112.

[2] *Ibid.*, 118.

[3] John Welwood, *Journey of the Heart: The Path of Conscious Love* (HarperPerennial: 1990), 13.

[4] Richard Rohr, *God as Us: The Sacred Feminine and the Sacred Masculine*, disc 2 (Center for Action and Contemplation: 2011), [CD](#), [DVD](#), [MP3 download](#).

[5] John Welwood, *Love and Awakening: Discovering the Sacred Path of Intimate Relationship* (HarperPerennial: 1996), 8.

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