

“The Way of Love – Re-Turn & Learn”

Sermon for the Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost – September 20, 2020
N. Farnham & St. John’s Episcopal Churches – The Rev. Torrence Harman
Exodus 16:2-15; Psalm 105:1-6; 37-45; Matthew 20:1-16

He didn’t use a blackboard and chalk. He drew a line in the sand with his finger and said let the one who is without sin cast the first stone.

He didn’t favor a classroom with chairs in a row, he told them to simply sit in the grass or gathered them around him beside a dusty road when a crippled man called out son of David, have mercy on me.

He didn’t have a pile of textbooks he referred to when he lectured, just words from Old Testament scriptures he knew “by heart.”

He didn’t ask them to take notes, just inscribe what they heard and saw on their hearts.

He didn’t require them to have pencils and paper, laptops or i-pads, just ears to listen and eyes to see.

He didn’t teach using lofty theories and big words; he talked about everyday things like grains of wheat, mustard seeds, the yeast that makes bread rise, things lost and found, like a coin, a sheep or a child. He told stories that echoed the stories they lived in their daily lives.

He didn’t assign anything to read or write for homework, just told them to go out and do miracles, then return to him and let him know how that had been.

He didn’t offer them a graduation ceremony, just fish cooked over a driftwood fire on a beach, a last breakfast. His final words: go, teach, baptize, love my sheep, feed them. And last but not least, I am with you always.

Jesus was a master teacher. The SOL’s (Standards of Learning) that he taught towards were designed to achieve knowledge about how to live day by day to grow into a fruitful maturity, one that promoted an ever expanding richness of life for the student and, by extension, the world in which the one learning to live, lived. A synergistic process, one in which life for all would be multiplied, made bigger, deeper, broader, richer.

His approach to teaching was both multi-sensory and what would be called today, experiential. We learn when all our senses and sensibilities are activated. We learn by doing; we learn by not just talking the talk but by walking the walk. We learn by connecting the “dots” – heart, mind, body, and spirit till we get to those “aha” moments when we see the light and then live, step by step along the wisdom way that unfolds before us.

In The Way of Love, Michael Curry, presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, speaks of a cycle that begins with “Turn” then cycles, clock-wise, to Learn. In this phase we are encouraged to explore

scripture – not just the words of the Gospel Good News scriptures, but even more specifically the Word – the Word that is Jesus Christ. The way he lived, moved and had being among those first century disciples, followers of The Way. The Way his life “preached” that Good News. When Jesus instructs those following him, trying to learn from him to go out and preach the Good News, he isn’t just telling them to use their mouths, to talk the Good News, but to show it, model it as they live it.

There is a fancy word called “congruence.” Jesus didn’t use it, but I believe it is a today word that helps us understand what he was trying to teach. It basically means to bring things together to integrate them into a kind of wholeness. If what we say is not in sync, not in alignment with what we do, how we “be” – our life is confused, disoriented. Confusing and disorienting to ourselves. The message and the messenger, to be coherent and have authenticity, need to be congruent, flow together.

Today, we experience the ritual of baptism as Chris Plaice experiences it ritually for the first time. We experience it, as we, remembering our baptism, speak words of commitment, re-committing our lives to the Way of Christ. As Chris turns his vision intentionally committing to the Way of Jesus Christ in the company of you as witnesses to his commitment, you and I are re-turning to the vision that we committed to at our baptism, where we either spoke that commitment for ourselves, as Chris is doing today, or it was spoken on our behalf by parents and godparents.

The reality is that as humans trying to travel a path towards a Divine way of life, we stray, we stumble, we lose our way along it, we turn away from it time after time, lured by worldly ways. We are called to return over and over again, and I believe that as we look back over our lives we see that happening, a re-committing, a re-orienting to the Divine vision for our lives.

For that opportunity to share in Chris’ ritual of commitment today, we give thanks to Chris for coming forward to do this, publicly. He is, by this decision, becoming a messenger of the message in a way that has the ripple effect of re-minding us to return to that divine vision, re-commit to it, re-turn to the Christ Way that calls us forward along that Way of Love.

Sometimes we forget what we have learned before. Today we are also called into renewed learning. Experiential learning. In a few minutes you will with Chris and this whole congregation of the trying-to-be-faithful people of God, that is you, Chris and me, speak of this commitment to learn by doing, by living into the message till each of us, by our lives, becomes not only the messenger but the message of God’s love. May we all find the courage (the heart strength) to do so. As we turn, re-turn to God this morning, as we begin yet again to seek and serve the Way of Love and abundant life, we listen to the wisdom of the psalmist who says “Search for the Lord and his strength; continually seek his face.” And as Jesus turns yet again to face us and asks us to follow him, we remember his message: “I am life. I will show you the Way.

By God’s amazing grace, may we see it, follow it, become a messenger of this in our lives . . .

Torrence

