

May 9, 2021

Our scripture readings through this season of Easter, have focused on two themes: emerging Christianity, and love... Our readings from the book of Acts have shown how the circle of Christianity started small, and began to get larger and larger, transcending language, cultural and religious barriers. In our reading today, Peter is astounded as the Holy Spirit is poured out even on the Gentiles—the “Outsiders.” This is us!

And the second theme has been about love. Last week we read “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God.” And about how love casts out fear. And today we read about how love will conquer, will overcome the world.

So, we have two themes, the expansion of Christianity, and love. In my mind these two themes are connected. They will know we are Christians by our love... One leads to the other, and vice versa.

Love is like the energy, or the fuel of Christianity. And doesn't that just make sense? It seems that love has a way of spilling over its container -- it just has to go somewhere and include others! Christianity is not only an individual thing; as much as it is also a community thing...

Quick story... Kris and I were married in March of 1980. We were young, not even out of college, idealistic and head over heels in love. We were married at First Covenant Church, Seattle. Kris' dad presided at the service; we had a lot of family and friends there.

We spent our honeymoon on the Olympic peninsula, right on the Pacific Ocean, and we spent our time walking the beach and collecting driftwood. It was a magical time. Wouldn't it be great if we could be on a mountain top experience like that all the time? Being in love, and being in love with being in love! Wouldn't that be wonderful!

Interestingly, after just a few days, we started to feel as though we wanted to get back to our real lives. In fact, we cut our honeymoon short a few days. Imagine! Kris' dad thought that was the funniest thing in the world!

Getting married was a mountain top experience for us, and somehow it was not only about us, but also about how our partnership was about making a difference for the world. It seemed our love was spilling over and it needed to go somewhere. Instead of being self-indulgent, we needed to get back to our family and friends. That's just what love does! It connects and includes...

Love is one of those intangible things that is hard to define and even sometimes hard to talk about. What is love? How do you know when you're in love? How can love be sustained? You know, the funny thing about love is that none of us are experts at it, and yet all of us are experts at it. We all seem to have some opinion or advice about love. So, we always need to be humble about it...

In our Gospel lesson today, we are commanded to love. And Jesus gives us some concrete clues about what that love might look like. Jesus says, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." I think Jesus is directly inferring that love is costly, it is not something that is easy or convenient.

And the truth is, it's hard to love people we don't like. And let's be honest, this is where we are much of the time, isn't it? It's easy to love the people we love;

loving people we don't like, now that's a different story! I wonder if that's why Jesus commands us to love one another. We all need a little push, a little guidance to go in that direction. And Jesus commands us to love-- as he loved us.

Let's be honest, we all have people that bug us a little bit... Now, learning to love these people, holds the biggest opportunity for transformation.

You see, we often project our own shortcomings onto others. And the things we dislike about others, are often the things we fear are true about ourselves. And when we can see that, change happens, transformation happens. It's like paying attention to the log in our own eye, instead of the sliver in our neighbor's eye.

Learning to love others, especially people we don't like, is dying to self, and rising to new self-awareness. And it is at the same time, humbling and transforming. Being commanded to love-- as he loved us-- is an invitation for transformation. It is law and it is most certainly gospel.

The good news today is that this is the work of the Holy Spirit... And I see this kind of transformation everywhere... I love Sunday mornings, I love seeing people greeting one another, listening, supporting and caring for one another. We are all different, and yet, we are all one in this body of Christ.

And as our Gospel lesson reminds us, this is all God's work; we were chosen for this. Jesus said, "You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last..." And indeed, and so it is... Amen.