

Sermon: “An Impossible Love”

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Imagine someone you love, who has been your teacher, your guide, your confidant, your prayer partner, your miracle worker, your healer, your partner in rabble rousing; the person who has spoken hard truths to you when you didn't want to hear it; the person who has loved you the most in your life, unconditionally, even when you've been hurtful and betrayed them. Someone for whom you gave up everything, just to be with them, to follow them wherever they journeyed.

Can you even imagine such a person?

Perhaps if you consider piecing together multiple people in your life into one patchwork person, they might come somewhat close.

It is difficult to imagine what it must have been like for the disciples to say goodbye to Jesus. Or how difficult it must have been for Jesus to say goodbye to the disciples.

I'd like to offer us a reflection on how we might interpret these two departing sentences from Jesus, who said to the disciples:

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, the Spirit will guide you into all the truth.”

Many interpret this passage around the unfolding nature of truth, which is often circumstantially made known to us. Meaning that it is our changing circumstances or the time, place, people, and situation we are in that allows us to understand God's truth throughout our life.

This circumstantial interpretation of Jesus telling the disciples that they cannot bear the truth that Jesus has to say in that exact moment makes sense. After becoming a mother this past year, I can certainly testify that my changing circumstances of having a child have illuminated more deeply God's truth and love.

Yet, as I reread the scripture this week, that first sentence brought up a curiosity around human behavior and our ability, or inability to share our heart-felt truths with one another.

Have you noticed that sometimes when we humans find it difficult to speak our emotional, heart-felt truth, we communicate in the most convoluted manner?

We dance complex circles around truth so that just the tip of our toe touches the truth, but otherwise we keep a safe distance, tangling ourselves in unneeded and obscuring chatter.

Humans have many defense mechanisms that we employ to protect ourselves from emotional vulnerability.

One defense mechanism is called projection, and it has been on rampant display these last few years by politicians, corporations, police departments, homophobic preachers, and everyday people too.

Projection happens when we have a trait or desire that is too difficult to acknowledge, and rather than confronting it, we unconsciously put it onto someone else—making that trait or desire their problem, rather than our own.

Projection makes difficult emotions more tolerable, by allowing us an external relationship from which to evaluate those emotions, rather than experiencing and processing those emotions directly within ourselves.

When I read the first line of John 16:12, where Jesus says to the disciples, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.” I wonder if Jesus is projecting, or displacing his difficult emotions onto the disciples.

What if it is Jesus who cannot bear the emotions he is experiencing as he says goodbye to those who left everything to be with him, those who love him most deeply, who have listened and learned from him, who have been his confidant, prayer partners, healers, and partners in rabble rousing. Those who have spoken hard truths when Jesus didn't want to hear it like the Syro-Phoenician Woman who challenged Jesus to see those beyond his tribe as worthy of God's message and love. Or his mother Mary, who birthed, breast-fed, raised, accompanied, buried, and preached the resurrection of her divine son.

What if Jesus cannot bear to say all of what weighs on his heart to the people who loved him most deeply. So instead, Jesus unconsciously displaces his feelings onto the disciples, telling them that it is they who cannot bear the truth.

Can you imagine a God-parent, who loves you so much, that they find it impossible to fully communicate to you how much you mean to them?

Can you imagine a God-parent for whom the mere thought of leaving you, breaks their heart into a million pieces?

Can you imagine a God-parent who sacrifices everything to be present to you, to reveal themselves to you as human, knowing that it will cause them deep pain and rejection from their own children?

Can you imagine a God-parent who then realizes that being present to their children cannot be limited to the incarnation of one person. A God-parent who then shares a part of themselves with you, each of you, so that you will have a guide in your life who will speak truth to you, who will tell you the things that are to come, and who will love you.

Can you imagine a God-parent, who is always with you, who loves you deeply, and will never leave you. A God-parent who is your teacher, guide, and confidant, your prayer partner, your miracle worker, your healer, and your partner in rabble rousing. Someone who will speak hard truths to you when you don't want to, but need to hear it. The person who has loved you the most in your life, unconditionally, even when you've been hurtful and betrayed them. Someone who has given up everything just to be with you, and who invites you to give up everything worldly to be with and follow them.

Now imagine that through the gift of the Holy Spirit, we are all meant to be that God-parent to one another, because that is the invitation that Jesus is offering the disciples and which is offered to "all flesh"—each of us.

The New York Times just reported new estimates based on a Center for Disease Control (CDC) health survey that about "1.6 million people in the United States are transgender, and a disproportionate 43% of them are young adults or teenagers."¹

Based on a Gallup poll released this past February, as younger U.S. Americans continue to come out at increasing rates, the proportion of adults who identify as LGBTQ+ will exceed 10 percent of the population in the near future.² This represents more than a double increase over the past 10 years, since 2012.

Over time it has become safer for people to identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer. In addition, new generations are emerging, replacing the generations of LGBTQ+ people who were killed by

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/10/science/transgender-teenagers-national-survey.html>

²

<https://www.nbcnews.com/nbc-out/out-news/percentage-lgbtq-adults-us-doubled-decade-gallup-finds-rcna16556>

the HIV/AIDS epidemic, by murderous neighbors, and who died by suicide because they lived in an unloving society, family, community, or church.

But it is not yet safe for everyone.

We have to be fiercely loving and louder than than blasphemous pastors who preach murder and the politicians hell-bent on legislating against bodies that are not white, cisgender, heterosexual and male.

Do you love LGBTQ+ people deeply and will you never abandon them? Can you be a teacher, guide, and confidant? A prayer partner, miracle worker, and healer? A partner in rabble rousing? Are you someone who will speak hard truths even when they don't want to be heard, but are needed, and will you listen to the hard truths of others? Can you be the person who loves the most, unconditionally, even when you've been hurt or betrayed? Can you give up everything worldly to be with and follow the LGBTQ+ kids, young adults, midlifers, and elders in your church and community?

It is a serious and weighty invitation that requires us to respond with love, affirmation, celebration, and protection for our lives and the lives of our siblings.

Siblings in Christ, we are facing some difficult weeks ahead. The Supreme Court is poised to overturn Roe v. Wade this week, and many are concerned that LGBTQ+ rights are next.

Be reminded that the Spirit of truth is here to guide us. We must be fiercely loving and take action to care for and protect one another.

Even when it feels like the world is conspiring to harm us and take our life, know that with God among us, we have the power to transform this world. Love each other well. Amen.

Benediction

In 2 Corinthians 13:13, Paul spoke this benediction to the Church of Corinth as it was torn apart by factions, the poor vs the wealth, one ethnicity against another, perhaps not unlike our country today:

“The grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.”

John 16:12-15 NRSVUE

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, the Spirit will guide you into all the truth, for the Spirit will not speak on their own but will speak whatever they hear, and the Spirit will declare to you the things that are to come. The Spirit will glorify me because they will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that God has is mine. For this reason I said that the Spirit will take what is mine and declare it to you.

2 Corinthians 13:13 NRSVUE

“The grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.”