

16B 2021

First, a short look back in order to put a few things into context.

As my friend in seminary used to say to me, “I know you know, but it’s good to review.”

We talked last week about the peace that comes from being humbly grounded in moral clarity.

Once, by the grace of God, we achieve some moral clarity, we need to be able to speak that truth gently and out of love.

God’s truth is powerful.

No one screams the truth or browbeats people with it.

Do not worry about being effective.

Truth (not our over-valued opinions about things, but God’s truth) has a curiously persuasive force that connects deeply with those who are able to hear.

Those who have given themselves over to greed and selfishness, on the other hand, have rendered themselves unreachable.

We must leave them to God in prayer.

Attempts to save others who do not seek our help are necessarily disastrous, yet this is common among church folk, who often think they know what others need and how to save them.

The more we get caught up in others’ drama, the bigger the mess we create.

Until others are ready to face their own truth, there is little we can do.

They must acknowledge that they need help, and then reach out for it.

That is the only way that we grow.

We need not, however, be deterred from lovingly speaking the truth when we sense that

God has shed light on something for us.

As Paul encourages, “Stand . . . and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on

the breastplate of righteousness.”

To summarize, do not try to save others, but speak the truth in love.

The truth has a power all its own.

I also have taught previously that there will always be people who attempt to manipulate

behind the scenes, people who act out of anger rather than love, people who

practice emotional blackmail, and they may wrap all this in a mantle of

righteousness.

You will remember that I said that such people feel justified in their behavior because

they feel they are somehow threatened, just as those who crucified Christ claimed

that he was a threat.

The true threat, however, is buried in our past, hidden from view and projected onto current situations.

If we do not acknowledge the effect of our past, then we are controlled by it.

In other words, if we do not acknowledge those instances as we grew up that made us feel unlovable, unworthy, unprotected, we are doomed to live in their shadow, and the more threatened we feel, the more justified we think we are in using tactics that are decidedly unloving,

all the way up to and including “Crucify him!”

Simply put, what we ignore controls us.

As Paul tells the Ephesians, “our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but . . . against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

That is, our struggle is not with others, but within ourselves.

The primary threat, in other words, is not out there, but in here.

When we ignore or deny formative events—things that made us feel unloved, unsafe, unseen, unworthy—we erect hiding places within ourselves where the forces of evil set up house.

Facing ourselves honestly, acknowledging the effects of our past experiences, our past traumas, clears the shadows.

Light, as they say, is the best disinfectant.

Once that is done, we feel less threatened and lose our reliance on less than honorable approaches.

We clear out room for God.

Only by dispersing the darkness that provides hiding places for spiritual forces of evil can we hope to discern God's truth.

Otherwise, we merely cling to whatever makes us comfortable in the moment.

As Christ tells his disciples: "no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father."

That is, we can form meaningful relationships of trust only after we have made room for God.

Many will refuse.

They will find the necessary work too burdensome or frightening.

When Christ's own disciples learn the level of interdependence in Christ's teaching, when Christ says that they must abide in him and he in them, they remark, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?"

Once they saw that the road ahead was challenging, "many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him."

Seeing this, Christ essentially gave the twelve permission to leave.

After all, only when we have permission to leave does our staying mean anything.

Eleven of the twelve commit.

“Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

(Judas, of course, pretended to be committed, but actually preferred betrayal over honestly walking away.

His shadows were dark and deep.)

If our faith is to mean anything, we all need permission to leave, permission to doubt, permission to reject.

Not only that, we also need permission to clear the shadows, permission to face our past, permission to move forward, permission to love.

Permission is an essential piece without which we cannot move forward, yet our individualistic society prevents us from grasping this essential piece and keeps us enthralled to the latest trends and products.

The notion that we can and should do it all for ourselves is individualistic bunk, a profoundly thorough version of divide and conquer.

Such individualism runs contrary to Christian anthropology, which tells us that we are all deeply connected.

This is why we do not use individual communion cups in this diocese and many others.

They commemorate individualism and undermine the message of the gospel.

So, first, and this is the main point of today's homily, we require others' permission to love ourselves.

Once that is achieved, we can clear a space for God by shedding light on our own hidden traumas so that we can be free of their control and open up space for God.

At that point, we will be able to discern moral clarity, God's truth, and feel at peace.

If anyone in life has made you feel unlovable or unworthy, unseen or unsafe, you have my permission to love yourself.

That is the gift that I can give you, that we can give one another.

You deserve to love yourself.

You deserve to have the shadows removed that others in their fear, ignorance, and greed placed there when you were powerless to resist.

We can accomplish none of this, we cannot discern God's will, we cannot face our own past and clear the shadows, we cannot find peace in our hearts, if we do not first love ourselves, and to succeed in that, we need others' permission.

So again I say to you, you have my permission to love yourself.

As a child of God, you deserve it.