

Needing Each Other

To hear some people tell it, the whole sum and substance of Christianity is to oppose gay marriage and abortion, a terrible and misguided shrinking of our faith, and yet that seems to be a very loud message today.

Amazingly, Joe Biden was just denied holy communion at a church in South Carolina because of his position that women, not the government, should decide the very difficult issue of abortion.

And I wonder, when will we see folks denied communion for being war mongers or billionaires?

Which is very much the point Jesus is making today, on this feast of All Saints!

I think abortion and gay marriage become a rallying cry for some NOT because of Jesus, but because of our all too human desire to be in a position of power over others, because taking the supposed moral high ground on issues that have no impact whatsoever on my life does nothing to challenge my defects of character, my brokenness, my need to change and repent.

But it sure does make me feel superior!

And maybe that's why we celebrate, rather than condemn, war and money.

Because in our heart of hearts, we so often have no faith in a God who invites us to meet him in weakness, who refuses to coerce, who pays the price of waiting for our love.

And that, my friends, is an invitation into the deepest mysteries of our faith.

An invitation that, if accepted, will shake us to our very core, will challenge all of our dearly held assumptions, and will, in due time, bring us to that narrow door, the entryway of the Kingdom of God; but not before turning our whole world upside down!

Some have called today's gospel lesson the Constitution of the Church.

Hear it once again....

"But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.

If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt.

Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again.

Do to others as you would have them do to you." Lk. 6:28-31

But can we do these things?

I can't.

Maybe you can't either.

But we can!

One of our members has a tag line at the end of all her emails.

It says, "Go faster alone, go farther together."

We need each other if we are to live into the kingdom that Jesus is creating on this earth even today.

As our body politic fractures, as news media give screaming headlines to all kinds of superficial nonsense, as fears and insecurities are exploited and as racism and bigotry become normalized, we need each other.

Our calling as Christians is to DO what Jesus says we must do, today.

As the writer once said: "Christianity has not been tried and found wanting, it has been wanted, but rarely tried." G.K. Chesterton.

We need each other; and we find our common ground in loving each other, even when we become enemies, even when we must turn the other cheek, walk the extra mile, NOT because we are naive or afraid, but because the power that holds all creation together chooses to flow through us only when we become vulnerable.

And lest we fear that living that way will lead to our annihilation, we need only look to our Lord, who lived this way, who was annihilated, and who, lo and behold, after three days, is raised into a new and marvelous life.

If we do what Jesus does, we will become like him too!

But we cannot do what Jesus does all by ourselves.

We need each other!

Which is precisely why our Lord assures us that when two or three are gathered in his name, he is here, among us.

A scientist studied a stump in Ireland.

It's 400 years old — and, wonder of wonders, it's alive!

Which baffles the scientist because trees, like people, must break down sugars to survive,

Trees need branches and leaves to do that, and this stump has none, yet, it is still alive.

How?

What the scientist discovers is that the trees surrounding the stump, feed it, keeping it alive.

And as he further explores, he discovers that the trees of the forest are constantly feeding one another.

Like the trees, we humans need each other!

What keeps us separated from one another?

For one thing, we live within our own world views, not even realizing it is OUR world view, not even realizing that the fellow over there lives in a totally different world of different expectations, different understandings.

In other words, we don't see things the way they are, we see things the way WE are!

Which is why this place, our beloved St. Elizabeth's, this community of prayer for all people, is so beautiful!

Here, our worlds can collide in a place that is open to understanding and insight and forgiveness so that in cracking open my world and cracking open your world ... we together may come to see our world through new eyes.

We need each other!

On Halloween night, as is our custom, we took a van load of young and older folks to Oahu cemetery, to sing a hymn and to hear the powerful words of the prophet Ezekiel who looked out over that vast valley filled with dry bones, and as his gaze took in fields of devastation, there comes the unmistakable voice of God asking him:

"Will these bones live again?!"

We go to the cemetery to remember that those buried there once stood where we stand.

We go to remember that one day we too shall occupy graves just like theirs.

We go to remember that our hope is not in being the one with the most toys!

Our hope is not in becoming a disembodied spirit strumming a harp on a cloud!

Our hope is in resurrection!

Our hope is in a new, eternal, transformed body, a gift from our loving God!

When ankle bones connect to shin bones, when nerves and muscle and sinew reappear, when skin and blood and brains are made new, when newly formed throats again shout out - Hallelujah!

All Saints Day reminds us that saints are not the shiny soaped up pure people who never do anything wrong.

All Saints Day reminds us that WE, together, helping each other, supporting each other, challenging each other, WE are the saints of God!

"It is we who are blessed - we, the broken saints and forgiven sinners."
Nadia Bolz- Weber

I leave you with this.

It's from a letter that Thomas Merton, wrote to a fellow who dedicated himself to these very challenges of Jesus, yet who found himself frustrated that little seems to change in the world.

Merton writes:

"Don't depend on the hope of results.

When you're doing the sort of work you've taken on, the apostles work, you may have to face the fact that your work will be apparently worthless and achieve no result at all.

As you get used to this idea, concentrate not on the results, but on the value, the rightness, the truth of the work itself.

In the end, it is not results, but relationships, that saves everything." J. Forrest, paraphrased.

So on this holy day, "I ask the God of our Master, Jesus Christ, the God of glory – to make you intelligent and discerning in knowing him personally, your eyes focused and clear, so that you can see exactly what it is he is calling you to do, grasp the immensity of this glorious way of life he has for his followers, taste the utter extravagance of his work in we who trust him—this endless energy, this boundless strength!" Eph 1:15-16.

+amen