

One Thing

What did you hear in the many examples that Jesus gives of the kingdom of God?

He's being quite intentional in trying to direct our attention to something that is always right in front of our eyes but what we rarely stop to see.

He's asking us to think in a particular way, in a way that's so different from our 9 to 5, Monday through Saturday, dog eat dog, way of life.

It's a mustard seed.

It's a bowl of flour.

It's a hidden treasure.

It's a pearl of great value.

A haul of fish.

In other words, everything that Jesus is pointing out today is about "one thing."

And he's talking to us about this "one thing" because he knows that the way we live our lives today is about "many things."

Our lives are often consumed with the external activities of raising a family, earning a living, paying the rent, getting our hair done, and making sure the car is washed.

At other times we are consumed internally with anxiety, confusion, or loneliness.

And Jesus knows that these “many things” will visit every life.

And yet, what is also necessary is that every day, for at least a little while, we step aside and pay attention to that “one thing.”

And what is that one thing?

This is that one thing: you are a beloved child of God.

That is the one crucial, priceless, irreplaceable, and eternal truth about your life.

You are a beloved child of God — not because of who you are or what you’ve done.

You are a beloved child of God because of who God is.

Because of what God has done for us.

If we can hold that one truth in the core of our being, and then go about our lives with its inevitable anxieties, fears, confusion, car washing and hair washing, then we will be always headed in the right direction, no matter the distractions and changes that come in every human life.

That we are, and always shall be, acceptable to God, precisely because of who God is and what God has done for us — is the central truth of our faith.

That’s the essential message that Paul has for us this morning.

His certainty that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ is his way of saying: "You are the beloved child of God."

That the "us" Paul refers to is not the small "us" of those who believe; but that in the cosmic Christ, the "us" he refers to is the universal US.

Every human being who ever lived.

Every human being who ever will live.

That, in the cosmic Christ, all of humanity is home free.

Which isn't to say that injustice and evil will be ignored or forgotten.

But that God in their wisdom and infinite mercy and infinite justice will indeed find a way to make right the so many things that are wrong in our world today.

And know this, how God will go about that — is none of our business!

Remember the old story about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?

Our parents were told to stay away from it.

So are we.

And what is the human response if we actually come to believe that we are the beloved of God?

Isn't the natural human response to this undeserved, unmerited, unearned grace, simply a desire to turn around and share it with others?

"Love one another, as I have loved you," Jesus says.

Such is the heart of our faith, and it's rooted in the certainty that all people are the beloved children of God.

When we were at Camp Mokuleia a couple of weeks ago, I told the kids and the counselors my friend Bob Capon's story about how we typically understand our faith — versus what our faith actually teaches.

Fr. Capon's story goes like this:

He says that most people think of Christianity like a day at the beach with families gathered around picnic baskets and children splashing in the water and everyone having a nice time together.

The lifeguard's name is Jesus and he sits in his tower and watches over everyone to make sure that everybody is safe.

One day, a little girl gets in trouble in the water and the lifeguard, Jesus, dives into the water, rescues the little girl, and brings her back to shore — safe and sound.

Everybody is relieved, and while some people criticize the parents for not watching their child better, pretty soon everyone gets back to life as usual.

Capon says that's the way most of us understand our faith.

We live our ordinary lives, but in the occasional emergency, we hope God will swoop in and save us, so we can get back to our ordinary lives.

But our faith, Capon says, is actually more like this.

Same scenario.

Families at the beach, picnics and fun, and a little girl gets into trouble in the water.

Jesus goes after her, but instead of a rescue, both the little girl and Jesus drown.

When people go to the lifeguard stand, there's a note from Jesus saying: "the little girl is safe in my death."

Now I realize that I probably sent home a bunch of traumatized campers because a priest told them that Jesus and a little girl drowned.

But because memories from camp sometimes stay with people their whole lives, I hope the story was traumatic enough for them that they'll remember it when they, like us, reach that stage of life when the time to create an ego and an identity with which to face the world has passed.

Most of us in this church today are at that stage of life where, if we wish to grow spiritually, we need to start learning how to let go.

How to let go of ego.

Of competition.

Of demanding our just desserts in life.

Which is the point of my friend Bob Capon's wonderfully traumatic story about drowned Jesus and the drowned little girl.

Because the essence of his story is that by Jesus' death and resurrection, not only the little girl, but the whole of creation, is safe in his death.

The whole of creation is now redeemed and renewed and restored.

And if we can live into that truth, then there is no more "us against them."

There is no more "the saved and the damned."

There is no longer "friend and enemy."

We are all, at the end of the day, the beloved children of God.

And truth be told, with 99.9% of the people with whom we share our day, if we could only walk in their shoes for a while, we would probably weep at the judgments that we cast — in ignorance and blindness.

And so today, Jesus invites us to reflect on this one precious thing.

That we are all of us beloved children of God.

And here's a practical way that we might live that out.

It's taken from a wonderful little book written by Thomas More:

“If there is one lesson you need to learn, it is to follow the stream wherever it goes, meandering, getting blocked, flooding occasionally.

Follow the stream that is the source of your life.

Recognize the stream that’s been charting your existence and creating your narrative.

You are born of that stream.

It’s moving, not still.

Unpredictable, not glued to a doctrine or a teaching.

If someone asks you what kind of person you are, you may answer: ‘I flow.’

I am not the stream of my life, but my life finds its shape as I observe and trust the stream.

I don't go where I want to go; I go where the stream takes me.” T. More, *The Eloquence of Silence*, 158-9. (Modified).

If we wish to encounter the “one thing” that Jesus offers, we begin by slipping into the flow – this flow that brings all of us home.

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