

## Outside In or Inside Out?

Genesis 45:1-15; Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32; Matthew 15: (10-20), 21-28

When it comes to learning how to be human, we don't get much better insights than in today's gospel.

It starts with Jesus sticking up for the regular folks when the religious holy rollers start hollering about cleaning up on the outside to folks who can't afford a bar of soap.

Jesus brings them up short, telling them that it's not from "the outside in" that we need to worry about, in other words, it's not what we eat or drink that messes us up, it's from "the inside out" that causes problems - what we think and how we feel.

And taking that a step further, you get the sense from Jesus that he's also talking about how we so often judge people, by looking from the outside in, so the well dressed and those who smell good are often held up as paragons of virtue, even if they are rotting hunks of bigotry or pride or hate inside.

So, the message Jesus seems to be giving today is "don't judge a book by its cover," which is all well and good until we run into this foreign illegal immigrant lady who's barking up Jesus' tree, insisting that he help her poor teenage daughter, who's suffering from some kind of teenage malady, and the response from Jesus is frankly, shocking.

It seems like he forgot what he just said about judging books by their covers, as he takes this lady to task from the outside in, precisely because she's a foreigner, a pagan, calling her not a child of God — but a dog under the table.

But the lady loves her daughter and won't be deterred.

And her response, that even the dogs eat the crumbs, seems to have schooled Jesus in just the same way Jesus schooled the big shots only a little while ago —

— and he sees her....

is it for the first time?.....,

not from the outside in, but from the inside out; his vision of her changes from female foreigner to a beloved child of God.

Sizing up folks from the outside in is all about summing someone up based on their gender or race or ethnic background, things over which we none of us have an ounce of control.

And sizing people up that way is so ingrained in what it is to be human, that even Jesus, fully divine, yet fully human too, well, perhaps even Jesus is not immune to the trap.

Which tells me that I don't need to beat myself up when I find myself judging folks from the outside in, but I do need to pay attention to myself, and realize that when I do that, it's time to change course.

And isn't this exactly what we've been consumed with in the news all week?

The love affair we have with eyeing each other from the outside in, instead of seeing each other from the inside out?

Isn't that exactly what caused all the horrors in Charlottesville last week, where skin color and ethnic heritage became a test for who's human, who's not?

But if we climb aboard the Jesus train, like Jesus, we too can move from experiencing life from the outside in to the joys of discovering life lived from the inside out.

Which is why Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke of his dream that one day his children might be judged not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character, because when we begin to see each other from the inside out, we begin to see each other for who we really are:

That our true self is something like a shining sapphire or glorious ruby or brilliant diamond; because our true self is made in the very image and likeness of God.

We can muddy this jewel with hate or bigotry or fear or pride, but we cannot destroy it, no matter how ugly, confused, bad or stupid we may be from the outside in, because that jewel is God within each and every human being, and at the end of the day, God will have us all, because from the inside out, my destiny is to see God with the same eye with which God sees me, your destiny is to be united with God, indeed, our destiny, as Meister Eckhart came to know, is to become God.

Seeing each other from the inside out allows us to smile with Joseph and his brothers, finally reunited after so much ego and pride on the part of Joseph, after so much envy and betrayal by the brothers, so that, moving from the inside out, even our very worst defects of character can be used by God for unimaginable good.

It allows us to nod in agreement as Paul makes it quite plain, not only to his readers way back then, but to every person ever since who has condemned the Jewish people — a sad and sordid part of our Christian history — that the Jewish people are now and always will be — the apple of God's eye.

Just last week, a former skin head and Nazi was interviewed by a woman on the news.

He spoke about what life was like in such groups, the fear, the anger, the hatred of those who are "different," the narrowness of worldview; but finally the interviewer asked the most important question:

"How were you able to change?"

And his answer was at once the most surprising thing I've heard for a long time, and yet, somehow, completely expected...

He said it was undeserved, unasked for, unexpected, compassion; given to him by strangers and family; it was compassion aimed straight at his soul, when what he expected were vicious verbal attacks or even violence.

It was compassion that melted his heart, that moved him from a life lived from outside in to a life moving from inside out, allowing him to walk away from the Nazi/skinhead way of life...

A few months ago a white British man plowed his car into a group of worshippers leaving a Mosque in London.

He killed one person and injured many.

Those victimized were naturally enraged at this act of senseless terrorism, but the Imam, the Muslim minister, took hold of the white man, put his arms around him, warned everyone to leave him alone, and safeguarded him until police arrived to restore order.

I wonder if that man too, having received undeserved, unmerited, unexpected compassion, also felt something give way.

How can we practice moving from a life of "outside in" to a life lived from inside to out?

Here's some practical suggestions:

    "...every day do something  
    That won't compute.  
    Love the Lord.  
    Love the world.  
    Work for nothing.  
    Take all that you have and be poor.  
    Love someone who does not deserve it.  
    ...Ask the questions that have no answers.  
    Plant Sequoias.  
    Say that your main crop is the forest that you did not plant,  
    That you will not live to harvest.  
    Be joyful though you have considered all the facts...  
    Be like the fox who makes more tracks than necessary,  
    Some in the wrong direction.  
    Practice resurrection."

Berry, Manifesto: Mad Farmer Liberation, Collected Poems, 151.

In your life and mine, if we focus on the outside in, what we get is anxiety and endless worry about the opinions of others, financial upheaval, even wars; and the end result is you either go nuts or you give up.

But if we focus on living life from the inside out, if we remember each and every day the utter reality of that precious and indestructible jewel that is your very essence, then no matter the blowing winds or torrential upheavals, we can know, in the very depths of our bones, that all shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well.

+amen