

Welcome

One of the quirky things about language is that translation isn't a 1-1 science. What I mean by that is English words don't always have exact counterparts in other languages. You may have heard the famous example of 'love', which in English has a pretty wide range of meanings. We can love pizza, love football, love our friends and love our romantic partner. Same word, very different meanings.

Greek has at least four different ways to express love, from eros, the physical love, to philos, the love between friends to agape, the unconditional divine love.

I learned German in school, German has this quirky ability to smash words together to make a new word. We do this a little bit in English - think schoolbus - but German does it on a whole different level.

A classic example is the word schadenfreude. It comes from two words schade, bad, and freude, joy. Bad joy.

Schadenfreude is that feeling of joy you get when something bad happens to someone else.

Like when that aggressive driver gets pulled over.

Or that obnoxious co-worker gets written up.

We know it's bad to feel that way - but it feels good, doesn't it? To revel, even privately, in someone else getting taken down a peg or two?

There's a particularly religious version of this impulse that I want to explore today. We see it in the attitude of street preachers who delight in telling passers-by they're going to hell. Or in the judgment of long-time church folk who seem to relish the punishment they know is in store for sinners.

We shouldn't *want* people to go to hell, should we?

I want to get at the root of that attitude today. Here's the question I want to ask: Is faith primarily something we do for ourselves? Or is faith something we do for the world?

What I hope we see today is that the movement of faith is one where we draw close to God so that God can send us to the world.

Message

Welcome to Easter-tide! Just last week, we gathered to celebrate Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Our series between the resurrection and Pentecost - the day we celebrate God's gift to us of the Holy Spirit - is called RECONNECTED. We're asking what it looks like to be plugged in - both to God and to the world to which God calls us.

What are the practices, attitudes and orientations God calls us to and gifts us with that enable us to be a church that engages and cares about the world around us?

For these questions, we're going to be in the book of Acts, which recounts the beginnings of the church. How did we go from a group of scared people who fled from the authorities when Jesus was arrested to a group that faced down persecution and fearlessly spread the good news of Jesus' resurrection to the world around us?

I hope we find a reflection of ourselves in those transformed disciples. I hope this series stretches our imagination about what is possible in our city, in our families, in our world today. How can we recover the same sort of bold faith we in those first followers in the wake of Jesus' resurrection?

We began by reflecting on the impossibility of our call - to embody Jesus in this broken and breaking world? How could we possibly accomplish all God call us to? We can't, which is why God gives us the Holy Spirit. So everything we do begins with us gathering for worship together, to be reformed as Jesus' body and filled with God's Holy Spirit.

Today, I want to look at a major shift that happened in Jesus' disciples after the resurrection.

Turn with us to [Acts 1](#).

If you were here a couple of weeks ago for Palm Sunday, you may remember that we talked about how Nationalism shaped their expectations of Jesus as the Messiah.

They were looking for a Messiah who would conquer Rome and reestablish Israel as an independent state, one who would rule the world.

We saw how those false expectations led to disappointment with Jesus, to abandoning and denying him.

But then he was raised from the dead.

A truly unbelievable event that they literally had to touch and see for themselves.

A lot of theologians talk about the resurrection as the thing that changed the disciples from fearful to bold. The resurrection proved Jesus' different way, the way of forgiving sin and loving enemies and gentleness, kindness, meekness.

But would it surprise you to learn that not all of the disciples were on board immediately?

Listen to the question they kept asking Jesus in that 40 days between his resurrection and ascension:

So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, “Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?” -- Acts 1:6 (NLT)

Hey Jesus! Is it time yet?

Time for what?

Time for you to kick out Rome, make Israel great again and give us all our rewards for staying faithful to you!

This is the question they asked a lot *before* Jesus was crucified. And you can imagine, can't you, how the resurrection restored their hopes?

Oh, we thought Jesus was defeated but LOOK! He was raised! It's a miracle! Now it's Super-Christ time!

And what they thought that meant was that return to the good ole days of stomping enemies and ruling the world.

I understand this impulse.

At several points, the gospel writers record the disciples wondering what their reward for following Jesus will be. After Jesus rebukes a wealthy man, Peter says, “Uh, wait a second Jesus... we all left our families and homes to follow you... we're going to get a reward, right?”

At another point, the brothers James and John ask Jesus to rule at his right and left, which makes the rest of the disciples furious... that they didn't ask first.

When they realized Jesus was the Messiah, they expected their faithfulness to be rewarded when the Messiah took his throne.

They still didn't realize that the cross *is* Jesus' throne, that his rule looks not like winning, but dying. And you can see that here: They think the cross was a speed-bump on the way to Super-Jesus. So now that he's been resurrected, is it time?

I encounter this same sort of attitude in Christians today. There's a conviction that following Jesus is actually sort of a drag. We have to follow all these rules, not do all the fun stuff that all the sinners get to enjoy.

But it's okay because in the end, we'll be in heaven, where we each get a mansion and have every desire satisfied and all those evil sinners who enjoyed sex, drugs and rock n roll here on earth will go to hell.

I have literally seen this expressed in Facebook comments, in bible study discussions, shouted through bullhorns.

It's so easy for our faith to turn inward, for us to be concerned first and foremost with what *we're* getting out of it. When we feel as if we have to make sacrifices, to deny what we really want because God said so, we get bitter toward the people who get to have all the fun.

Consider the story Jesus tells of the prodigal son. A man has two sons, and the younger cashes in his inheritance and flees to the city, where he blows all his money on sex, drugs and rock-n-roll. Once he's destitute, he comes crawling back, only to have the father embrace him and throw a party on his return.

We love this story, but too often we forget the older brother. We forget that Jesus told this story specifically because he sought out tax collectors and sinners and partied with them, and the religious people were jealous and condescending. They - and maybe we? - are the older brother in this story.

During the welcome-home party, the father notices his older son is missing. When he tracks him down, he begs his son to come back to the party. But listen to what the older brother says:

but he replied, 'All these years I've slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!' -- Luke 15:29–30 (NLT)

Do you hear it? The older son would *rather be partying with prostitutes*. He doesn't actually *want* to live with his father. He calls it 'slaving away'. He's *jealous* of the younger brother, and so he's *angry* when his faithful slavery isn't celebrated.

You can almost imagine him saying, "Well I guess I might as well go blow all my money on the fun stuff too, if this is how you reward sinners."

Sound familiar? It makes us ask: do we *really* think Jesus' life is good news? Do we believe that his life is *actually* better than life without him? Do we *truly* trust him that sin leads to death? Or do we just think God is a cosmic killjoy who offers an unbeatable retirement plan?

BREAK

Friends, *this* is what the disciples still had to unlearn during this time of Eastertide. The cross wasn't a detour on the way to a conquering Christ. The cross shows us to Jesus really is, who God really is.

The question is not, "Can we be good so we can get into heaven?" but, "Do we want to follow a God who would die rather than kill his enemies?"

This is what the disciples had to learn, and it's why Jesus responded to their question the way he did:

So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, "Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?"

He replied, “The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” -- Acts 1:6–8 (NLT)

I love that he first says, “When the End comes is none of your business.”

But then he promises the Holy Spirit (stop me if you’re picking up on a theme!), and then tells them their job is to go tell everyone. Be a witness for Jesus’ new life all through Judea, in the neighboring (and enemy) region of Samaria and then in the whole world.

Last week, we saw that Jesus told them to wait for the Spirit. And once the Spirit falls on them, they are to follow the Spirit’s lead in telling the whole world about this upside-down, inside-out, totally backwards God-who-died-for-you.

In other words, they have become the older brother, and God now sends them into the world with a message of hope:

God isn’t angry. God isn’t judging you. God hasn’t come to destroy you.

God has come to save you. God’s throwing a party in your honor. All you need to do is come home.

An Anishinaabe author named Patty Krawec wrote for *Sojourners* magazine recently, reflecting on how often in the Bible humans stand between people and destruction. Abraham and Moses both pled with God to avoid destruction. Jonah lamented when God chose to spare his enemies. But there are also some figures like Noah, who said nothing in the face of the flood. Or the older brother in Jesus’ story, who could not rejoice that his brother had returned.

Her whole article is terrific - she ties this attitude into the rotten fruit of colonialism and racism. But I wanted to offer her closing words as a meditation for us to take into communion with us:

The world created by the white colonizing church is one in which most Christians are safe. We sing songs and rely on Bible commentaries from those eras. Jim Crow and Indian boarding schools aren’t that long ago. Ruby Bridges, that little girl who had to be escorted to school by U.S. Marshals, is only 67 years old today. Some of those who opposed her are elders in our churches; they preach in our pulpits.

These are our relationships and our ancestors. I am in no position to sit in judgment over whether they are real Christians, whatever that means. It feels good to distance myself from participation in dominating others, but it’s not that distant, not when we still sing songs about being slaves to fear or having our souls made white as snow.

I am Anishinaabe and Ukrainian; my ancestry is both here and elsewhere. My inheritance is both Indigenous and settler. I grew up in the church, and so that too is where my relatives are, my ancestors. I have a responsibility to *all* my relatives: To not remain silent. To speak, though my voice shakes. To argue with those who claim to speak for God at the end of our world. — Patty Krawec, “Why Was Noah Silent at the End of the World?” *Sojourners*

We live in a world where people who claim to speak for God are announcing condemnation and judgment.

But we know the real story: when there was a chance for the church to turn inward, to welcome the Messiah and celebrate as he crushed his enemies, Jesus rebuked that.

Instead, he turned us to the world and said, “You’re all going to be ambassadors of my good news. I have come not to condemn the world, but to save it.”

Communion + Examen

Jesus makes a space for everyone to come and receive food.

When in the last week have I engaged those of a different faith with love and compassion?

When in the last week have I looked at others with condescension or judgment?

When might I be tempted toward condescension and judgment this week?

How can I allow God to form me to love the world this week?

Assignment + Blessing

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