

Pastor Roy's Sermon from September 1, 2013 (Labor Day)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jesus, master teacher and storyteller knows his audience. He watches the guests at a banquet in which there were a variety of important people. All feeding their egos as well as their faces. All wanting to feel important and be respected by everyone in the room.

How might he remind them of wisdom and the depths of compassion and mercy? All that seemed to move them was self image and appearances. Should he directly confront them? Or start where they are and work toward God from there? Could they grasp the simple beauty and joy of true service, true humility, true love? Or were they destined to be consumed by "What's in it for them." Jesus decides to teach from the starting point of their egos.

These who want glory and honor, recognition by their peers and beyond. Of course, there is a place for recognition. But a life focused on seeking accolades will be unstable and those who live that way will be trapped in the misery of desire. Jesus calls them instead, to be proud in a humble way. To sit lower on the totem pole so that they may be exalted. I think is being subversive here. He doesn't really want them to seek glory at all. Perhaps he is hoping that when they place themselves with the poor, that they will learn something from the poor. To learn humility not for pride sake, but for the sake of love. Maybe if they sit with the poor, they would learn to love the poor. Maybe if they humble themselves, they will learn that the seats of honor are overrated and filled with traps and pitfalls. The seats of honor bring more stress than they are worth, especially if they are sought just to stroke one's ego.

Next Jesus speaks of eternal rewards. Jesus knows that perhaps if they are kind to the poor in order to get an eternal reward, they might learn that the greater reward is actually in the kind action itself. The greater reward is found in getting to know the poor who know what's real and are closer to the mind and mercy of God than are the wealthy and powerful who are distracted.

Is Jesus teaching us that kindness even for wrong motives is the road to simplicity and purity of heart? Is this another reason why Jesus calls us to not judge the people around us? --for each person's pilgrimage takes them on a unique journey?

If we honor others and make room for them, we will learn compassion. We will learn to love. We will learn that the needs and perspectives of others are as valuable as our own, even if they are very, very different.

I believe Jesus is teaching us that if we do the right thing, the right attitude and right intentions will follow.

Jesus' teaching is true simplicity. Humility. Compassion. Kindness. Learning to love for love's sake.

The road to loving like this is a winding one indeed--one which takes us through many dark, but honest places. A path whose only certainty is our dependence upon God and God's children all around us. We wish to be safe. We want to protect ourselves from trouble, avoid embarrassment, be named among the great, or at least among the good.

I believe Jesus is suggesting that the journey into God's presence is not studded with ease, health, and wealth.

Jesus knew it was much more important to be named among the poor, to be named among the lowly—to have our egos starved of their viselike grip over our wallets and social networks.

Jesus is proclaiming freedom to live and love, freedom from the illusions of our false self/ego's never ending quest for what is always out of reach, for what appears to satisfy but creates suffering and despair.

The good news is this: Jesus invites us even when our intentions are wretched, to push ourselves, for whatever reason, to do the right thing, to listen, to give space for our spirits to grow into grateful maturity.

None of us has arrived. It's not in our natures to arrive. We are creaturely creatures on a journey. We labor. We fall down. We see the good to do but don't have the energy and time to do it. We choose among our options, sometimes nobly, sometimes with an intense weariness.

But our journey goes on. We ride on. We open ourselves to this Spirit of God who invites us to live the life of compassion, however we can, even if our intentions and motives are not faithful. God is leading us in a journey into God's presence. Into mercy. Into love. Makes no sense at times, the journey feels arbitrary and at times unfair. But we are not alone. We have a guide. Jesus is leading us in the Spirit to trust, to be grateful, to be compassionate, and sometimes through the most unexpected and unlikely passages.

Perhaps the most important step we can take in our journey is to listen, to make room for the people who will never be able to return the favor. Our reward will be instant and the effects for ourselves and our neighbors will be eternal. If we live with compassion, we will know wellness and peace for we walk with God.

Let us make room for our neighbors, especially the poor, and the true needs they have. This realm of God's mercy is the only kingdom fully worthy of our dedication--the realm of God's love which is the content and perfect end of our life's journey.

Remember and take time to listen to the poor. Thanks be to God. Amen.