

Pastor Roy's sermon from September 1, 2019

Jesus tells his story of humiliation and disappointment after he watches men positioning for power at a religious dinner party.

Perhaps the heart of the matter is that we are tempted to think that our actions and accomplishments give us value rather than God's gifts to us. These gifts, our bodies, our relationships, our amazing abilities, curiosities, and interests—these are our true self--made in the image of God. And we get distracted from living fully in the image of God.

So how do we find healing? How do avoid the distractions of our minds-- past experiences and future concerns? How do we gain back our freedom, contentment, and joy?

We are taught in so many ways from birth to death that if we do the right things, we will be rewarded—that we can earn a good life. Yet, over and over again, it doesn't add up. This is the conversation between the books of Job and Ecclesiastes vs. Psalms and Proverbs. Yes, there is wisdom and wise living. . .but no, there are no guarantees and we do well to avoid judging.

And we are surprised each time, in our heads and souls, we are surprised that it doesn't all add up. Why, if I have tried my hardest to do and be all these helpful things, do bad things still happen? Why do I feel so lost? Why do I fail despite my good intentions to do well? And why am I not content with the gifts which God has given me. Why do I reach for something more? Is healing possible?

Jesus proclaimed in his healings and teachings a simple healing. **We are invited to live in love. Humility is love.** Jesus invites us back to our God gifted true selves by opening ourselves to live in love rather than by trying to pull off the perfect life. He invites us to keep coming back to love— compassion and mercy. Giving ourselves over to love, over to God is freedom.

The church has often focused more on sin and the need for salvation than the healing nature of love. And so we have spent much time beating up on

ourselves and focusing on judgment than freely enjoying God's beauty and kindness and love.

Jesus invites us to be our true selves, which is to seek love in all of our relationships.

He says, "All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

And if we aren't sure how to humble ourselves, that too is simple--by helping and loving the poor, the jobless, the disabled, the homeless, those with destructive addictions, those fleeing violence and persecution in their native lands, and the mentally ill. And as we do, we will be blessed **because** those friends cannot repay us.

Instead as Jesus says, we will be repaid in a resurrection quality of life and in spiritual freedom. These are the immediate rewards of those who live in love. Love is pure grace. We earn nothing in love, but in love we find freedom and joy. Yes, it is an enduring struggle to live in love! But by the grace of God we can live into the freedom of love in all of our relationships. This is the gift and love of God. Amen.