

“Love and Reconciliation” by Rev. Dr. Peter Thompson

Mark 11:15-18

Isaiah 57:7, Jeremiah 7:11

2 Corinthians 5:19

First things first. I thought we were talking about the Transfiguration of the Lord today? What does this story about Jesus turning over tables in the temple have to do with the Transfiguration? The short answer to this question is it doesn't, at least not directly. I believe though, considering the application and interpretation we began with in worship today, “that we see with eyes of wonder, see the divine presence in the world, see the gleam that is each person, see others beyond their faults, see with eyes of mercy...”, that the theme of transfiguration builds a solid foundation for us to see with new eyes what exactly takes place in the event of Jesus turning over tables in the temple.

So, then what does this story of Jesus in the temple share with us? At first, we might perceive this story to be one expressing Jesus' passion and zeal, and perhaps even anger over a cause. Would we be wrong? Maybe and maybe not. Is there more to this story? Is there more to Jesus' response and action toward those working in the temple courtyard? What are we to make of Jesus' words convicting those that had made God's temple, which is supposed to be a house of prayer for all nations, a den of robbers?

What I believe we are called to see from this story is love and reconciliation. I believe Jesus' act of turning over the tables in the temple was an act of love. An act of love for God and the true purpose of the temple. An act of love expressed in spirit and truth. An act of love on behalf of all those who were being kept from the house of prayer because they didn't pay the cost of entry required by those at the gate. An act of love toward those who hurt him and a whole lot of others through their perversion of the temple. An act of love in an effort to bring reconciliation to the true purpose of the temple as a house of prayer for all God's children.

Let's talk about love for a moment. A biblical definition of love starts with God, never with us. 1 John 4:9-10 says, “We love because God first loved us.” God is love itself; it is God's character that defines love. Because God is love, God acts with love toward an undeserving world (John 3:16-17), to save us from our sins and reconcile us to Godself (Rom 5:8). The pure and perfect love of God is typified in the love relationship between God the Father and God the Son, which Jesus shows to his disciples. And because Jesus showed it to his first disciples and that good news is now passed along to us, Jesus has showed it to us.

In response, people (we) are to love God. We are to love God above everything else, which is the greatest commandment. And part 1 B of the greatest commandment tells us that people (we) are to love one another as we would love ourselves. And the last time I checked, the greatest commandment, or any of God's commandments, are not multiple choice or based on

how we feel that day. They certainly are not there to manipulate or justify into our own comforts or benefits, like say those in the temple courtyard had gotten sucked into.

Paul writes over and over that if a person loves God, he or she will also love other people (Galatians 5:6, 1 Thessalonians 3:6), because loving others is an outflow of God's love for you. 1 John 3:10 says, "Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his or her brother or sister." This is believed to sum up the entire law and has become known as the "royal law."

In our love of one another we demonstrate our obedience and faithfulness to Christ's teachings. Now, it is one thing to love those we know, hang out with, agree with, share a good history with. But the love of God is not that narrow. Perhaps the greatest challenge about love is that we are not only to love God and fellow believers; we are to love all people, even our enemies and those who persecute us (Mt. 5:44). This charge is also included in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and since being a faithful child of God means paying attention to all of Jesus' teachings and not simply pick and choose the ones we like or are comfortable with, we are invited to love even those we think unlovable or undeserving of our time and relationship.

Let's now talk about reconciliation. To dig deeper into reconciliation, there are few layers we much acknowledge first. I will begin with the end in mind and that is that reconciliation is the ultimate end result of love being fulfilled. I think reconciliation is a term best understood in the context of relationship. Take for example our relationship with God. When we are created, we are created to be in right relationship with God. However, our sin and brokenness cause hardship on our relationship with God and it no longer is right. There is nothing more God wants than for all of us to be in right relationship with God and so there is nothing God will not do to seek us and help us to be rid of our sins and brokenness and be whole again. God's beloved son Jesus is proof of this. God seeks us and provides for us out of love, so that we can be reconciled, or brought back into right relationship, with God. Reconciliation is restoration, renewal, and wholeness. And the many layers of reconciliation include love, acceptance, maybe some tolerance, understanding, and forgiveness.

So, what? So, what... is that we, as faithful children of God, who are loved by God, accepted, sometimes tolerated, understood, and forgiven by God, are to then pass that same kind of love, acceptance, tolerance, understanding, and forgiveness to others whom we may have a broken relationship with. And then, in the power of God's grace and glory, maybe then we can experience reconciliation in our broken relationships.

A key component of reconciliation is that we must acknowledge a brokenness or betrayal or hurt or sin that separates, taints, or strains a relationship. Here we can consider the relationship to be between us and God, us and a spouse, us and a child, us and a friend, us and another family member, us and the place we work or go to school, us and the community, us and the church, us and a teammate.

We don't like to talk about it and we certainly don't want others to see how much we may be hurting but hurt happens. Hurt stings. Hurt can be painful. Call it disappointment, or disgust, or disregard, or disrespect. From a change, or seasons of change, loss, detachment, stolen freedom, heresy.

Hurt happens in life. Mostly between the people who are closest I think: friends, family members, colleagues, teammates. Hurt happens between us and God. Have you ever been angry at God? Maybe you didn't get what you expected from God. Maybe God didn't listen. Maybe you think there is just know way God cares about you in comparison to all the other people and needs of the world. Hurt happens between us and the church. Yes, I said it. The church can hurt people. The church is a group of people and so yes, people can hurt other people.

There is hurt in this sanctuary here today. There is hurt with those of you on the radio. There is hurt with those of you on video. There is hurt that has prevented some people from being present in worship this morning. There is hurt that has prevented some people from ever wanting a relationship with church (anywhere) again. There is hurt that prevents some people from ever wanting anything to do with God again.

Some have been hurt:

- because they or their loved one wasn't visited by the pastor in the hospital or at home during a tough time. Maybe it was last week or maybe it was 20 years ago.
- by a decision made by leadership (staff or session).
- by the lack of decision making within leadership (staff or session).
- by what they perceive to be truth or may even know to be truth.
- by feeling disrupted or displaced.
- by traditions not being kept the way they want.
- by new opportunities of invitation and learning.
- by more inclusion and acceptance of others coming to be a part of church.
- by not being asked to do everything like they once were.
- by feeling as though they are no longer needed.
- because they were told they didn't belong here.
- because something, at some time, didn't go their way.
- because they have borrowed the hurt of another without really even knowing why.
- because the time of worship changed, or location of worship changed, or an element of worship was added or taken away.
- because accountability was enacted and that exposed things we didn't think could possibly be true.
- because they feel the letter of the law in scripture hasn't been followed rightly and faithfully.

There is hurt. Relationships are broken. We are not here to debate the severity of the hurt or whether we might think some of these seem tedious. People feel what they feel for a variety of reasons. The better question is whether we are willing to try to understand and accept each other, and the hurts we have, and work to mend our hurts. Mending relationships is a two-way street. Both sides need to work and give and receive together. As long as there is hurt, there is a need for grace and love and reconciliation between us. I think the charge for us in this is that we need to see differently, with eyes of mercy. I think the charge for us is that we need to be willing to turn over some tables in the temple of our relationships and expose the spirit and truth.

Disclaimer of what reconciliation is not. To come to a reconciliation in a relationship is not denying your hurt. It is not saying what happened or how you felt, or still feel, is not real or is unimportant. It is not saying what happened is ok. Any more than forgiveness, which is an essential step in the process of reconciliation, is saying what happened is ok. To come to a reconciliation is not necessarily saying you agree or like what happened.

What reconciliation is though, is a process of the surrendering of the pain our hurt can cause and rule our lives with and prevent us from having relationships with others. With God, reconciliation is a work in which God removes the enmity between Godself and humanity. Such removal of enmity between God and the human race should lead to our missionary zeal- to our being Christ's ambassadors- to work toward reconciliation between ourselves- to remove the enmity that may exist in our relationships. The effort and willingness to work toward reconciliation is a sign that the hurt does not have to be the thing that defines your relationship; that you are willing to try moving beyond the hurt; that you are willing to try and understand what took place and why; that you still desire more from the relationship and refuse to give up on it or throw in the towel; that you will try to have the courage and strength to go on. Why? Why love and reconciliation? Because God said and did so. Why else? Because each of us, as children of God, those we know right here today and those we have lost touch with, are worth being in relationship with. We need each other.

It is sad for me to say this, but it would seem in our society and world today, that the thought of love and reconciliation are rather revolutionary. Consider these lyrics by Josh Wilson:

*Maybe you're not like me- Maybe we don't agree- Maybe that doesn't mean- We gotta be enemies
Maybe we just get brave- Take a big leap of faith- Call a truce so me and you- Can find a better way*

Let's take some time, open our eyes, look and listen...

Why does kindness seem revolutionary? When did we let hate get so ordinary?

Let's turn it around, flip the script- Judge slow, love quick... God help us get revolutionary.

What would Jesus do? He would love first. He would love first- So we should love first.

God help us get revolutionary. Yes, God, help us get revolutionary with love and reconciliation!