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John 14:15-21

Acts 17:22-31

Psalms 66:8-20

1 Peter 3:13-22

May 17, 2020

The Sixth Sunday of Easter

How many of you have recently heard this question asked: What kind of world do you want to go back to after quarantine? Or, maybe you have heard it put this way...What do you want to keep and what do you want to let go of when things go back to normal? Or, better yet...what even is normal?

I am very clear about my answers to those questions. And, my clarity on the subject troubles me.

I am so certain about what I would let go of and what I would keep. I am certain about how I want my new normal of a world to look. It isn't hard to envision. I would work in the garden and tend my bees. I would ride my horse and read more. I would focus on ministry and simple acts of carrying out God's love.

I would let go of material wants, focusing on only what I needed. I would let go of eating out so much so I could save some money. I would stop adding more to my to-do list and just enjoy the work in front of me.

It's so easy to name how I would reevaluate and reshape my world. And, that ease is the problem.

As each day passes and as I linger outdoors thinking about a simpler way of life, I realize the privilege of my options. The fact that I even have options has started to make me question the actual question.

What kind of world do you want to go back to after quarantine? I then I realize, maybe the answer isn't so easy, after all.

You see, I can say I will let go of material things and not buy that new shirt because I already have a closet full of perfectly good clothes. I can say I will not go out to eat as much because I am fortunate to have enough food at home to feed my family and not only do I have enough food, I have enough money each week to buy that food. I can say I would stop adding to my to-do list at work because I don't have to worry about whether or not I have a job tomorrow. Do you see what I am getting at?

So, yes, it's easy for me to answer these kinds of questions because I have the ability to make choices. And, it's getting harder and harder to answer these questions about my ideal new normal and not also recognize the disparity gap among people that don't have those same choices.

It is calling me to a place of deep reflection and I hope it is doing the same for you. Now, please know, I am not calling you to reflect on disparity as way to invoke guilt. Quite the opposite. I ask you to reflect on disparity at this particular moment in history to create within you, in all of us, a sense of hope. A sense of hope that as we question what our new normal will look like, we will also question how we can create a more equitable world where everyone has the ability to build a life of wholeness.

In our Gospel from John, Jesus states, “On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.” Jesus is talking about a unified creation bound together by God’s love, a love brought into being by a mutuality that puts at its center a common conviction of equality and respect and care for one another.

This past week, Richard Rohr highlighted the revelations and writings of Julian of Norwich, who lived in the mid to late 1300’s. In 1373, she experienced an illness that nearly took her life and during that time, she had a series of visions where Jesus spoke to her in a series of profound teachings.

Let me highlight a few of Julian’s reflections on what she learned.

The first is about our individual life. Julian states, *“This beloved soul was preciousy knitted to God in its making, by a knot so subtle and so mighty that it is oned in God. In this oneing, it is made endlessly holy.”*

In other words, our soul is holy and we are made one with God, a beloved soul knitted into being with a sacredness that is beyond measure.

The second lesson is this: *“Furthermore, God wants us to know that all the souls which will be saved in heaven without end are knit in this knot, and oned in this oneing, and made holy in this holiness.... no person can separate themselves from another.”*

Julian’s visions taught her that we are all bound together in a knot of God’s creation, an unending unity that requires our realization of a common purpose and a common bond. That means that knot of oneness includes a lot of folks. The ones who have choices and the ones who don’t. The ones who are “getting it right” (whatever that means) and the ones who seem to keep getting it wrong. The ones society welcomes and the ones society ignores. The ones you agree with and the ones you just can’t stand. Yep...you guessed it...we are all in that knot together, bound in community.

And here is what I am reminded of when I read Julian of Norwich...we are not meant to exist in the dichotomies of disparity. The solutions aren’t always easy to discern but we must start to recognize them and allow God to speak to us in ways that expand our ways of thinking and being. We must allow God to open our hearts to a more inclusive and expansive love that exists in the oneness of all of creation.

In full disclosure, I have a long way to go to live into this directive. I am too often caught up in what's right and wrong (at least in my definition of what's right and wrong). I am too often caught up feeling helpless in the midst of such great need in the world. I am too often caught in feelings of anger or resentment towards someone or even a group of people that are simply hard to love. I am too often protective over my own choices because I fear a loss of freedom and security if I share too much.

Possibly you can relate to some of these.

But, maybe it's time that we sit with this discomfort. Maybe it's time we claim our fear of including others or sharing our time and our resources. Maybe it's time to tell God that this is really hard and we need help.

Because it is OK to ask for help and guidance in times like these. It's OK to admit that you don't have all of the answers. And, if anything is normal these days it's that we probably aren't sure how to make a difference with all of the challenges in front of us. And the confusion you may feel? Well, that's pretty normal too.

So, with that in mind, let me leave you with a poem by Wendell Berry entitled, *The Peace of Wild Things*.

*When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.*

The message I want you to leave with?

These times are indeed hard. They are hard for each of us in a multitude of ways no matter who we are or where we are from or what we may be experiencing; but together, with love in our hearts and compassion as our guide, we can sit and listen for God's guidance. We can pray for strength and courage. We can lift up our hope and dispel our grief. And in doing so, allow one another to rest in the grace of the world so that my choices may become your choices. Amen.