

Sermon 24.04.21

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John 10:11-18

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. **I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold.** I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father."

1 John 3:16-24

We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us-- and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and God knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

SERMON:

The birthday of the world - the story of Tikkun Olam. repairing the world.

Last week we explored how this ancient Judaic phrase - Tikkun Olam - is closely related to Jesus' way of being in the world. Our work is to be the light and bring out that light in others. That's the work of repair - practicing social justice, nonviolence and forgiveness.

Back in January 2020, before the world knew much about the brokenness of COVID 19, I was invited to breakfast at Esma's home. We'd met downstairs, in the English language classes. She's from Turkey, and we'd agreed to an informal conversational partnership to give her a chance to practice her English. As I got out of the car that morning I realized I was empty handed - no food, no flowers, no nothing. A little embarrassed I entered - a little puzzled by the mountains of food on her beautifully laid out table. The other Turkish woman invited had to cancel at the last minute. Just the two of us. Esma had made enough food for 10 hungry people. That morning she kept encouraging me to try new dish after new dish as we chatted away. I left full - more than full, with food and conversation.

I'm guessing many of you have had similar experiences - no matter where you've lived. Where you've been overwhelmed by the hospitality shown. It's humbling to receive with little to offer back.

Repairing the world - Tikkun Olam - this is the work of all of us. Not the rich, not the poor, not the refugee or the settled - it's the work of all humanity.

Truly seeing one another - seeing the light within them, even when no one else sees it. That's love. That's Tikkun Olam.

This work of repair requires hospitality, a willingness to open heartedly receive.

Giving and receiving. We need both.

I've been reading *Circling the Elephant*¹, a book about the theology of religious diversity. One chapter focuses on how the work of Gandhi shaped the work of the civil rights movement and specifically Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. 's thinking around nonviolence.

That chapter explored King's willingness to be open to new ways of understanding Christianity; of learning from the other.

Repair requires hospitality, this giving and receiving, of seeing the light, the light that already exists in all peoples, and learning from one another.

¹ Thatamanil, John. 2020. *Circling the Elephant: A comparative theology of religious diversity*. Fordham University Press, NY.

In an address to missionaries, Gandhi told them: (SLIDE)

“To you who have come to teach India, I therefore say, you cannot give without taking. If you have come to give rich treasures of experiences, open your hearts open to receive the treasures of this land, and you will not be disappointed, neither will you have misread the message of the Bible.”
(*Circling the Elephant*, p. 198)

You cannot give without taking - open your hearts to receive the treasures of this land - this is the message of the Bible.

Gandhi, a lifelong Hindu, studied the Bible carefully, especially the teachings of Jesus.

Our reading from 1 John this morning insists that we can't believe in Jesus without selflessly loving others. Belief is action, Jesus showed us that.

Belief is action. “Brothers and sisters, little children” John writes, “let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.”

Repairing the world requires that we, too, be open to being changed; to receiving.

Let's stop for a minute and try something - take in a full, deep breath - now let it go. Breathe out. Breathe out some more, and some more. No taking; no receiving, just keep giving.

We can't just give. We need to receive. We are changed, in the smallest of ways, with each breath we take in. So natural we don't even pay attention. This flow of receiving and giving is happening all the time.

Martin Luther King Jr. was changed by the work of Gandhi. His faith expanded; his understanding of Jesus and our work in the world was radically influenced. King wrote, in his book *Stride Toward Freedom*: (SLIDE)

“As I delved deeper into the philosophy of Gandhi my skepticism concerning the power of love gradually diminished, and I came to see for the first time its potency in the area of social reform. Prior to reading Gandhi, I had about concluded that the ethics of Jesus were only effective in individual relationship. The ‘turn the other cheek’ philosophy and the ‘love your enemies’ philosophy were only valid, I felt, when individuals were in conflict with other individuals; when racial groups and nations were in conflict a more realistic approach seemed necessary. But after reading Gandhi, I saw how utterly mistaken I was. Gandhi was probably the first person in history to lift the love ethic of Jesus above mere interaction between individuals to a powerful and effective social force on a large scale. Love for Gandhi was a potent instrument for social and collective transformation.²

² p. 205 *Circling the Elephant*, quoting from King's book *Stride Towards Freedom*.

King asserts that Christians receive from Gandhi not merely a new method, but a new understanding of Jesus. (p 205).

This willingness to be changed by someone not professing Christ as Lord and Savior was met with harsh criticism.

King believed that all people were invited to share in the 'beloved community' - regardless of religious differences.

In a letter to Dr. Fey, the editor of the Christian Century magazine, King writes: (SLIDE)

I believe that in some marvelous way, God worked through Gandhi, and the spirit of Jesus saturated his life. It is ironic, yet inescapably true that the greatest Christian of the modern world was a man who never embraced Christianity. This is not an indictment on Christ but a tribute to Him - a tribute to his universality and His Lordship. When I think of Gandhi, I think of the Master's way in the words of the fourth gospel: "I have other sheep that are not of this fold."

(CTE, P 207)

Jesus said "I am the good shepherd." The good shepherd gives everything for his flock. That good shepherd takes the time to know his flock - knows their habits, their needs, their fears and delights. And they trust him.

Jesus went on - "I am the good shepherd...and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold."

Repairing the world insists that we learn from one another. Listen to one another; believe there is light hidden deep within every body.

In our children's story this morning, those sparks of light fell everywhere - into everything. Our work is to help those sparks grow bright again - so bright that they become visible.

(SLIDE)

How do we find them? that little girl asked - that wise grandfather told her:

we can't see them with our eyes
we can only see them with our hearts

only your heart can see the spark that is hidden in everyone and everything.³

Last week in Sunday school we wrestled with how to have conversations with family and neighbors about hard to talk about topics.

I've been thinking about that a lot this week. The ways we respond feels linked to this work of repairing the world, of being hospitable in that work - in truly receiving from the other as well as sharing our ideas - and tied to our scripture this morning.

In that letter to his community, the author of John's letter reminds them that we are to believe and to love, just as Jesus commanded us. It's in that that the Spirit of Christ abides in us.

Yes, that Spirit abides in us.

In the author's note of our children's book, Remen writes: (SLIDE)

“When you see with your heart, you notice things you have never noticed before. You can see below the surface of things, the appearances of things, and discover extraordinary things in ordinary people.

When you see with your heart, you see what is hidden; you see the beginnings of things; the seeds that will one day become a mighty forest.”

When you see with your heart, you see what is hidden.

I know that when someone tells me what I need to think or do differently that rarely brings repair. When someone receives my hopes and fears - that's when the seeds of change are planted.

My friends, may we join the Risen Christ in this work of repairing the world. Tikkun Olam.

May we open our hearts to see; to receive; to be changed bringing ours, and others, lights to this broken world.

³ Remen, Rachel Naomi. 2022. *The Birthday of the World*. Cameron and Co. Publishing.