

Fellowship of Hope Sermon 2022-01-16 Making Room/ Driving out the beasts (Life and light outside the lines #2)

John 2: 13-22

First joke that came to mind was one told to me years ago by Gordon Gibson who was pastor at the Elkhart Unitarian Universalist Fellowship. Had told him a Mennonite joke that has no relevance but you can ask me afterwards. So he told me his favorite Unitarian joke which was: What do you get when you cross a Unitarian with a Jehovah's Witness? Answer: Someone knocking on doors for no apparent reason.

Do I have an apparent reason for continuing to knock on the door of antiracism, dismantling white supremacy and working toward interracial, intercultural communities of faith?

If a nonviolent reading of this passage is correct, and I believe it is, then in a sense it is about making room for others in our worship life, our church life, our personal lives.

This making room

- **Is rooted in sacrificial/self-giving love of Jesus and the Reign of God**
- **Has to be conscious, intentional, and prophetic**
- **Calls for attention to character and crowding**

1)Making room is rooted in sacrificial/self-giving love - the kind of love we see in Jesus, the kind of love that characterizes the Reign of God

A little book I'm reading slowly and reflectively right now – A Lever and a Place to Stand by Richard Rohr

Archimedes early Greek philosopher and mathematician noticed that if a lever was balanced in the right place on the right fulcrum it could, proportionally move much greater weight than the pressure actually applied. *"Give me a lever and a place to stand and I will move the world."*

The love of God shown in Jesus Christ lived out in self-giving love is, to me, the great lever and place to stand.

- One of my favorite quotes in understanding Christ's sacrificial love and where it takes us is from (surprise to those of you who have known me a long time) Fredrick **Buechner is a short piece he wrote on the theme of "judgement"** –
- *The New Testament proclaims that at some unforeseeable time in the future, God will ring down the final curtain on history, and there will come a Day on which all our days and all the judgments upon us and all our judgments upon each other will themselves be judged. The judge will be Christ. In other words, the one who judges us most finally will be the one who loves us most fully.*
- *Romantic love is blind to everything except what is lovable and lovely, but Christ's love sees us with terrible clarity and sees us whole. Christ's love so wishes our joy that it is ruthless against everything in us that diminishes our joy. The worst sentence Love can pass is that we behold the suffering that Love has endured for our sake, and that is also our acquittal. The justice and mercy of the judge are ultimately one.*

- Christ's love sees us whole (not just indiv. but also "US") and is ruthless against all that keeps us from that wholeness (hard to believe sometimes, perhaps because it is also endlessly patient) (the arc of the universe is long but it bends toward justice)

- **King quote from Strength to Love: Antidotes for Fear**

"What is the cure for this morbid fear of integration (of being a truly intercultural church)? We know the cure. God help us to achieve it. Love casts out fear...Hatred and bitterness can never cure the disease of fear; only love can do that. Hatred paralyzes life; love releases it. Hatred confuses life; love harmonizes it. Hatred darkens life; love illumines it."

- Can't get away from these two quotes – they led me to Christ. My evangelists: King, Buechner, and seeing folks, like many of you, trying to figure out, all the time imperfectly, most of the time graciously, how to live it out.

IF those understandings of sacrificial love are my overall lever and place to stand, then working toward an inclusive, justice-oriented church or beloved community that, however imperfectly, is one of the natural places for that to play out.

Howard Thurman in recalling the history of **founding of The Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples in San Francisco in 1944**, talks about putting together the basis for the congregation in his autobiography ***With Head and Heart***, and it went like this – It was hard work but came to this:

"I affirm my need for a growing understanding of all humans as children of God, and I seek after a vital experience of God as revealed in Jesus of Nazareth and other great religious spirits whose fellowship with God was the foundation of their fellowship with humankind.

I desire to share in the spiritual growth and ethical awareness of women and men of varied national, cultural, racial and creedal heritage united in a religious fellowship.

I desire the strength of corporate worship through membership in The Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples, with the imperative of personal dedication to the working out of God's purpose here and in all places."

I identify with that statement at many levels and look forward to visiting it this spring – part of my sabbatical. But even back at the beginning of that fellowship in that location it was hard work.

2) Making room (individually and corporately) takes conscious, intentional, prophetic action - and even then it is HARD

- **FOH attempts** – Isaacs, trying to develop partnerships and friendships, the Beloved Community – and have seen fruit, but it is and has been hard

- **Hively 10, count em 10, nationalities** BEYOND white European ones – at least attending regularly at one point, now, post-pandemic two definites and four maybes – how difficult to genuinely incorporate/integrate and be intercultural/multicultural
- It's HARD (Glenn Kehrein and Raleigh Washington) ??
- **Worship – can study and agree but making the changes** – and I'M LUCKY – 4 part harmony one nice little element for me, but giving it up much/most of the time not a biggy to me – I'm more nurtured by Jim Croegaert style and Andre Crouch style music – but being truly intercultural is even different than that.
- **Korie Edwards in her well researched book, The Elusive *Dream*** – argues that in many “interracial/intercultural churches” people of color are asked to set aside their preferences more often than white people, so that no intercultural church is likely truly intercultural until it thoroughly addresses white supremacy. Although, that doesn't mean she thinks it isn't worth striving toward, it highlights the HARD work it truly takes.
- **Jacqueline Lewis (Middle Church, NYC) in The Pentecost Paradigm: Ten Strategies for Becoming a Multiracial Congregation affirms this difficult work, but also offers a note of hope:** *“There is no way to sugarcoat it, this is difficult work. Creating authentically welcoming and inclusive faith communities that offer safe and brave space for all; helping people hear one another across borders of ethnicity and culture; and building trust and setting norms for sharing power and influence is hard work...The payoff? Offering God's people the opportunity to build communities that dismantle racism and xenophobia as we model the radical love of Christ in a broken world.”*
- **I find this “making room” to be one of the few things I find worth continuing to work at however hard, however long, and however old I am –because I keep seeing this vision of God's reign – all the nations streaming toward the light of God in Christ**

3) Finally, making room calls for attention to character and crowding - might be the “driving out” – asking what really is the purpose of worship?

- Sandra Maria Van Opstal (*The Next Worship: Glorifying God in a Diverse World*) - **Experiencing God and Embracing God's mission**
- **Character:**
 - What is it I believe about the character of God's reign?
 - Not for the sake of commercialization – because it will “sell” or markets well
 - Not for my ego's sake
 - Not with some kind of delusion that it's easy if we all just get along
 - But because it comes out of a vision of God's reign that calls me beyond myself
- **Crowding** -How do I pursue this dream and also “*get out of the way*” while also “*getting in the way*”?
 - **Just be on the way** – favorite movement song: **Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around?** – I will and have had to let some correct me – but not turn me around
 - Know that the Jewish believers struggled with this as well, its not a surprise
 - I may not get there with you

- But I see glimpses – I have particular worship experiences from time to time locally and nationally, occasionally at Hively a particular worship service where it feels like we have broken down the walls a bit, see more congregations working, if not at being interracial and intercultural, at becoming antiracist and, while Sunday morning may still be one of the most segregated hours in our country, the number and percent of intercultural interracial congregations has like doubled or tripled over the last 20 or so years.
- May not see all of what I'd like in my life time
But the Spirit is making room and driving out the beasts
Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around

Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around – keep on a'walking, keep on a talking, marching into Freedom Land.

The Freedom Land of God's reign on earth as in heaven.