

Jan Hus Presbyterian Church and Neighborhood House
June 27, 2010

Facing Into Love (Draft Notes)
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I don't know if you have ever watched, America Has Talent. I watched it for the first time last week and was reminded of every show that ever showed the funny side of who we are as humans – from the granddaddy of them all: The Gong Show, to The Dating Game, The Newlywed Game, Candid Camera, People are Funny and so on. We really are a funny group this human creation. One of the funniest Candid Camera's is of this guy who just walk up to people and scream at them, they then jumping in the air, throwing their coffee high, and so forth. If you'd like to see what I mean, just search "funniest candid camera moments" and you'll find the You Tube.

It is, perhaps, that ability to see the hilarity in our lives that is most important and healthful and spiritual when it comes to dealing with the reality of our lives, not only in the sense of other people – but in looking inward into ourselves. Keep the laughing self in mind, as I read this passage from a Buddhist monk about the nature of self:

"Let us accept the fact that the Buddha knew the truth when he said everybody had seven underlying tendencies: sensual desire, ill-will, speculative views, skeptical doubt, conceit, craving for continued existence, ignorance. Find them in yourself. Smile at them; do not burst into tears because of them. Smile and say: "Well, there you are. I'll do something about you."

I remember this from other venues, in particular in a practice I was taught in addressing fear, for example. It was to greet the "fear" when it arose as an old friend, saying something like, "Well there you are again, Old Friend. I guess we'll be walking side by side for a while. Let's make a deal, I won't bother you and you don't bother me."

Surprisingly, this works. It takes practice, but it takes the power of fear out of fear itself, and like a helium balloon that rises too far in the atmosphere it just pops!

Another thing about self, ourselves, according to the Buddhist tenets is that there are six roots inside each of us. Three roots of good and three roots of evil. While, I have still developing thoughts on "good" and "evil" as opposites, I stay with the language for the purpose of the example. The three roots of "evil" are greed, hate, delusion. While the three roots of "good" are generosity, loving-kindness, and wisdom.

The point for this morning and what I offer for reflection is that these “six roots” or other equal amounts of the human condition exist in all of us. They will invariably appear and at different times do so with varying degrees of strength. They are some of the underlying roots of everyone’s behavior and there is no blame or pride in recognizing the “bad” or the “good.” They just are. And as we go forward in our lives, we strive to grow into the better sides of ourselves, but clearly know that we are never “cured” of the human condition. Nor are others. The ability to see and love ourselves in such light makes it much more possible to see and love others even more. And, this, leads us into this mornings readings and lesson, if you will.

Paul was having a bit of trouble with the churches in Southern Galatia (Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe) that he had earlier established. He sent an Email to these churches, which back then were carried by foot, trail, and boat to try and get them back on track.

He starts off by reminding them that they were set free by Christ, no longer meant to be “burdened by the yoke of silvery.”

We really do need to step back into time a bit just to get the flavor of the period. Think of the bondage of the folk living in those ancient times. What was freedom in first century Palestine? If you were a Roman, you had certain privileges and powers, even laws, but freedom? Limited at best...

The Hebrew nation had its traditions and faith which it was allowed to practice, but only if expedient for the Roman government, frequently made possible by the hierarchy of the priests and others, who, in concert with the Romans kept the peace and when the peace was no longer being kept needed to make the choice between the people they served and the privileges they enjoyed from the government.

This new “movement” was causing trouble, and there were those who wanted not to upset the status quo and were trying to get those who had followed Paul to turn aside, shift their face back to the old ways of government and religion.

The freedom that Jesus represented was very real and very threatening to the sociopolitical and religious balance that was kept in place by a complex system of oppression. It was a time when church and state were not separate, an example we know all too well in our own history of Jan Hus Church.

Paul’s message of freedom in following the teachings of Jesus were “an opposite” of what was and there was resistance and efforts to quell any uprising.

However this freedom movement was not something that was familiar in terms of how to put it to rest.

Paul states: You, my sisters and brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.

In this quick and concise statement, Paul makes clear the difference between freedom and license. That he primary reason for freedom is not personal pleasure but to love one another. "use your freedom, not to indulge the 'sinful nature' rather, serve one another in love"

He goes even further in addressing the challenges of the call to faithfulness in the teachings of Jesus and the pull of the traditional laws. He says, simply:

The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

And then the warning:

If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

Yes, love your neighbor as yourself. But the hard part of that has been understanding what "loving" myself actually meant. Did it mean I ate well, stayed in good shape [not too many chocolate doughnuts], got enough sleep, etc. certainly those things and more have to do with how I feel, and how I feel about myself, but loving myself?

This (and I) is still works in progress, but it seems that I have the sense of loving myself when I am forgiving accepting, patient, kind, and light-hearted towards *me*.

And, it is the opposite of the thinking of my early years, in which it was all about being perfect and good and "without sin" – upon the completion of which I could look at myself with acceptance or, maybe even love.

And this is about acceptance, as well, of me – not analysis.

I almost entitled this sermon, "I need a blow-out preventer," but I didn't want to trivialize the disaster in the Gulf, without at least using the words in context, but it's true. Any of these tendencies of mine to want more: prestige, money, power, etc. any of these can appear at any moment because they are as much a part of me as are the tendencies

to be patient, kind, light-hearted and even a candid-camera type practical joker. It's just who I am and who we are.

We all find ways to grow, become enlightened even, and as we do, we recognize that *perfection* is an ideal, at best. I have to learn to understand myself, as well.

For me, that is only made fully possible when I see myself as a reflection of God as I understand God. In that reflection, I see the love of God, and when all other things are in place, when I am cutting myself some slack, I can see even the rough edges of myself as being no reason not to love myself, and in some ways more reason to love me, to counter with the loving, compassionate side, as I might someone else.

I have to admit, it is not an easy thing to always do. I was brought up believing that God was watching my every step and judging me moment to moment like some deified Simon Cowell. I was always in competition, with God's rules and my living up to them and failing more often than not.

Once I learned to know God as a kinder-gentler Creator, one who loved me – all of me – well, the contest in which the prize was heaven or hell slowly faded.

Life became an attempt at *loving* practice. Starting with me. Starting by showing myself some compassion, which in turn makes it easier to love others.

There's a note on my door that comes from Thomas a Kempis that says, "Know All and You Will Pardon All." I believe that is true. And I think there are extensions to that. Love yourself and you will love others.

Paul takes the knowing oneself and being set free through God's Love as embracing the Spirit that is and is in each of us, and almost tongue in cheek {and for the Galatians in response to the fervent effort to impose the old law in an attempt for the rulers to regain control] he says:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

I might add that there is no life and no law that would not be greatly changes if in fact all lived by such things.

But even when we don't, even when others don't, we can still love ourselves and one another.

And Luke's passage this morning affirms this. Here is Jesus and his followers on their way to Jerusalem. Jesus has resolutely set his face to the task ahead based on the Love we try to understand better. When along the way others are less than hospitable he instructs the disciples who want him to rain down fire on the miscreants – to just leave them alone.

Leave them alone. Don't lose track of what it is you are to do, what we have to do, and leave others to whatever holds them back. Go on to those who will welcome you, and sooner or later Love will catch up. Choose Love in all your actions and remediation of actions and sooner or later everyone will be touched. There is little Jesus says about **now** except that it is at hand, the kingdom of God is at hand. You have me **now**.

And so we do.

And no one said it would be easy. In fact, Jesus was probably a little bit strident about it all. And under no illusions about a place to hide or escape what it is one is called to do.

Ultimately, the words of Luke and Paul are about the same things. loving oneself is all those things I mentioned: patience, not taking things too seriously, knowing you are loved by God - but it is also about having the courage to be who you are so that you can love others from such a place.

To build on a familiar slogan: "To Thine Own Self Be True...especially in love and laughter."

From there, loving others is just a matter of practice.

To end with a quote from an anonymous Buddhist monk,

Love is the wish that we and others should be happy.

May it be so and may we in our following of the Spirit find such love and pass it on to others.