



Sunday May 12, 2024

John 17:6-19

"Unsee"

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Following Jesus as a child seemed simple. You are kind and loving, you pray, you give, blessings are abundant.

In Sunday School there was some talk about struggle...you know Jonah, Noah, Moses...big dramatic stories that felt more like movies than actual life experiences of struggle. The underlying lesson that following God is best and not following God leads to destruction.

Then when it came to Jesus, I heard the love loud and clear. I celebrated Palm Sunday and the triumphal entry and absolutely loved Easter. Happy Happy Happy...

As I entered my teen years there was a sense of a deeper and more difficult journey between Palm Sunday and Easter. There was an edge that I felt in my body but didn't totally know why.

I am so thankful that my child-self has the opportunity to have experience reading scripture in communities that understand the beauty, complexity, context and limits of our full understanding when we are in the Word. In this moment I also recognize the gifts of the Liberation theologians, the Mujeristas and Queer theologians who continue to inform and transform my reading.

The Gospel of John is a gospel of words... lots and lots of words. The narrative has movement and breath flowing throughout. For context, this passage that is about to be read is in an in-between space. The Gospel of John has gotten us through the life of Jesus, the teachings, parables and how the disciples have come alongside Jesus and it's getting increasingly difficult for Jesus to know who is for him or against him. He is keenly aware of what has been prophesied and the struggle ahead. This struggle will not be just for him but for this community of disciples and those who have experienced this new life of liberation and expansiveness. This passage is not a record of Jesus teaching but rather an intimate moment of prayer between him and the Divine as he anticipates what may be.

So when we hear it we should not be listening to it like we listen to the Sermon on the Mount or a parable but as a prayer.

My dear sibling Jessica whose vocation is in anti-racism training and guiding folk through practices of detoxing from systems of supremacy constantly reminds those who she is teaching to breathe.

Obviously, we are alive, we are breathing but when we are listening and feeling and metabolizing we hold our breath so high and tight.

The reminder to breathe opens up our whole bodies. I practice this and believe it is also a way for us to make space for Spirit to move in and through our thoughts and feelings. So let's breathe together.

Breathe

"I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.

I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours.

All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.

And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled.

But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.

And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

Breathe

Jesus is praying...."***I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you***"....then a little further in "***I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not***

belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. "...and then towards the end-stay with me " I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves." finally "As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world"

Jeeeeeusus, Jesus that is a lot of words and world...so what is it? Where do we belong? Are we in or are we out? Where should we want to be? Where do we end and where does God begin? Also, there are a lot of people who call themselves followers of you who use this idea of being in the world but not of the world as a way to mess with people and create more and more borders between us. This is why we need to read scripture in community and in context.

Breathe-

In bible study this week, I was grateful for our conversation on this passage. We spent some time recognizing that while we have heard these words as binary, they really have a lot of room for us to breathe. You see even though Jesus is preparing himself for his death and eventual resurrection, he is worried about his community. Things are taking a turn; he knows one of his people will betray him. He knows the disciples, they will not only be sad, they will be vulnerable because they have chosen to live in light of a gospel of liberation for all. This means they have set themselves apart from Empire systems that marginalize people who do not prop up the powerful and there are no exceptions.

The mercy and liberation they know has been modeled by Jesus. This good news has been experienced and witnessed and they are all in and also so far out when it comes to the world. And the world wants nothing more than to destroy liberative, expansive love.

Belonging.

There is something innate in us that draws us into a longing for belonging. Belonging is validating, comes with a heightened sense of security and frankly by our cultural standards, belonging is power giving.

We all can recall stories from the past and present where we deeply want to feel like we belong and we come against resistance... it may be a peer group, a space or our families of origin. There are also places where we used to "belong" and now, well we may be in it or adjacent to it but there is a disconnect. We have experienced new ways

of understanding ourselves and others through the lens of liberating love and well either we are uncomfortable or others are uncomfortable by our convictions.

Breathe

Might Jesus be praying that the disciples and those who live into and proclaim this liberating love find joy in something more?

Praying that like when we come up against oppressive powers and principalities is a way we return to this expansive and deep knowing of liberating love as a way to ground ourselves-Jesus experienced this and knew it was hard. Also, Jesus still recognized the holy opportunity he had when he was on earth to do all he could to teach, spread and celebrate the restoration liberation has to offer.

He knew heaven was near but continued to be present in the mess of it all.

*Some glad morning when this life is over, I'll fly away
To a home on God's celestial shore, I'll fly away
I'll fly away Oh Glory, I'll fly away.
When I die Hallelujah by and by, I'll fly away.*

This is a favorite of my mom's family. It is sung often and at everyone's funeral. It is catchy, it has illusions of joy never ending if we can just make it through these weary times. It is a beautiful image but it limits the opportunity we have right now to understand joy here and now. This joy will not be complete but nevertheless there is joy to be had here and now, in the midst of our weariness. Not just in heaven but in our belonging to the Divine. This belonging is not bound by space. It is beyond our understanding of the cosmos.

Also, translations matter....the Greek translation uses the word *sýmpan* which is actually not the world but rather the cosmos. We could take a deep dive into life on other planets but for now I think it is imperative that we recognize that Jesus is pointing to a very expansive way of understanding "the world"; it is not just the world- it is all of it and while we abide in it does not mean we belong to it.

Living into liberating love does not mean we have no responsibility to this world. It's actually the opposite. We have been placed here to live with the understanding that this place is all God's and we have been trusted to care for it and one another. This belief is an understanding that this world so desperately needs. Jesus knew the holy beauty and mystery of liberation but was and is not naive to the alienation that it will create.

We are here but this is not where we should be seeking out belonging- any belonging in this world, this universe, pales in comparison to the liberating love Jesus knows and God gives.

Jesus knows humanity has been claimed for liberating love, not for cheap counterfeit promises of people and empires that proclaim limits to God's ability to love and be present to every living thing, on earth or otherwise.

Our belonging to anything in this world is not and will not be enough. Rejection and isolation will be a part of understanding this liberation. People will hate us because we know there is more and as we sang this morning. You can't run out of love!

This is why we are called to community- how we find ourselves here at Grace Covenant. There is no way to go at this alone. We have to be reminded over and over again that this matters and that even though we are weary there is joy to be had... for everyone.

Breathe-

Living in light of liberating love and grace is wonderfully horrible. I long for space where we tell our stories of our personal liberation. Carrying on the narrative traditions of our ancestors so that we can be reminded of the consistency of God's presence and so that we can remember and learn from those who have kept the faith and whose shoulders we stand on.

When we can recall these stories, we can also recognize that expansive and liberating love can be dangerous. It is not binary and it has no borders- none! Empire emphasizes binary thinking to shame and gain power- pushing our liberation further and further out of reach because it divides us, liberation is collective and communal.

And yet Grace Covenant we know there are not many communities like ours and when we believe in this expansive and liberating love for all, oftentimes we will find ourselves with smaller circles of community and family, chosen or otherwise because of the fear that liberation for all brings to those who limit God's power and employ division for control.

Jesus felt this tension so deeply. This prayer is a record of the recognition that liberation has an edge and Jesus is asking God to protect the disciples as they live into

and proclaim the expansiveness of God's love that is for us all but so misunderstood in light of the world and its empire's systems of oppression. Jesus knows the disciples cannot unsee the transformative power that is evident in and around us when Divine love and liberation for all is proclaimed and practiced.

Breathe

Jesus prays that the disciples would be sanctified-set apart. Not because the disciples are better than or loved more than anyone else but because Jesus knew that they had a holy purpose. The setting apart-the sanctification was being set apart for a Holy purpose, not for division.

The result of this holy task is joy.

Joy can be expressed in so many ways and many times we confuse these expressions with the actual feeling or culmination of what joy is. Joy is a deep knowing- an inner understanding of delight and rejoicing that takes hold of us and strengthens our resolve. You see, we know what joy is and if our joy is a fraction of what is possible through this liberating love then we have to keep going knowing that this is part of God's dream for humanity.

Perspective is key to sustaining our resolve. Being able to zoom in on the everyday living and presence we need while zooming out to remember all that has been and is possible.

Those who study space and space exploration describe this perspective as the overview effect. The overview effect is a term coined by space philosopher Frank White who wanted to more deeply understand the impact of space exploration on the people who were traveling.

What he heard over and over again from astronauts and cosmonauts was almost indescribable and hard to convey. Some of the impact was seeing Earth itself in its entirety from above. Some of it was seeing Earth against the backdrop of the universe. These explorers are also seeing the universe for the first time in a way that not many have seen. Time changes. Explorers move around the earth frequently so there is a realization that time is earthbound. Oh yea, and this experience is all happening while they are weightless. An understanding of being grounded is obliterated and yet, this perspective brings clarity and a sense of knowing that exceeds their previous lived experience to this point. Being able to see and experience the universe without borders and in its expansive fullness is more than our language can describe.

Breathe-

We need to understand that proclaiming this liberative love for all brings tension to many of our relationships- some may fall away or cause you to walk away- Jesus knows this.

So, how can we protect ourselves, our communities while we move and proclaim more liberation? Sorry but, I don't know that it is possible. We can't ignore that Jesus, our ancestors, so many have been taken out...this is the truth.

Breathe-

What I do know is this....

Protection will probably not be emotional or physical safety... it will be a cosmic sanctified knowing that strengthens our resolve to continue to work toward the healing that is possible through the liberating expansive love of the Divine. This is what I believe and hope we keep fostering here.

It is the joy, the sanctified deep knowing that cannot be destroyed, taken over, commodified, or obliterated. That doesn't mean the world won't try. But this is our collective legacy- the continuation of hundreds of years of liberation laborers.

Another learning I had from my reading about space philosophy was that those astronauts that travel to the moon had a common crisis when they could no longer see earth clearly. This was distinct from the experience of space travel when earth was still in their sightline. Something shifted when they could no longer locate their world, the place where they have lived and loved and wanted to return to. This overview effect is so similar to what I think Jesus is praying about. This is not our home and we can't get our minds around it... we exist and are called to live, not waste this time and space all while understanding there is more.

Faith is in the tension of living, loving, dying and transformation. Zooming in and zooming out.

This prayer is an opportunity for us to get a glimpse into the way Jesus holds us and will not forsake us as we live into and out of this Divine love of liberation.

Grace Covenant, we are part of making the joy of God complete.

Thanks be to God. Amen.