

“Perfection Not Required”
Maundy Thursday
March 20, 2008

Mark 14:12-50

The cynic among us – the cynic, in other words, *inside* us – might ask us this night, “Why are we gathered here, ready to hear the same old story ... the same old story that’s been around for nearly 2000 years?” The cynic among and within us might rightfully ask, “Whatever message or truth this story has, haven’t you gotten it yet? Haven’t you figured it out by now? Why do you have to cover the same territory, year after year?”

On this night, my own heart’s answer to the cynic within me is a simple one. It’s a simple answer with two parts, and both parts come in a gentle whisper. The first part is this: this story doesn’t have “a” message; it doesn’t have “a” truth. There is not one right way to encounter, to interpret, or to incarnate what God offers us in and through this story, just as there is no one right way to encounter, interpret, or incarnate what God offers us in and through Jesus.

So the first part of my answer is simply that there is no single “it” that we haven’t gotten yet, even after 2000 years. There isn’t a single message that’s in this story that we’ve been too slow or too stubborn to figure out.

The second part of my answer to the cynic within me is this. We tell and retell this story (and so many other stories) because they do teach us things we need to know and we need to be reminded of the things we’ve already learned from them. We repeat these stories that have so many layers and so many meanings because we need to be reminded of the truths in them that we have discovered or heard or seen out of the corners of our eyes.

We need to be *reminded* of these things because, even when we’ve felt the encompassing presence of the Spirit of God and even when we’ve been healed through a sacred story, a sacred touch, or a sacred word, we *forget*. We forget that we are loved. We forget that we do not travel this life alone. We forget that our lives are intertwined with the past, the present, and the future. We forget that to be human means to be showered by grace. And, irony of ironies, we forget that to be human is to be vulnerable, always vulnerable, to *forgetting* these things. We forget that we are all vulnerable to forgetting that we are loved, that our lives are intertwined with eternity, and that God’s grace is truly, abundantly amazing.

Perhaps my answer will silence our inner cynics long enough that we can now ask another question. Perhaps now we can ask, “What, then, might this night offer, here in this place and among this group of God’s beloved people?” What does this night offer? My friends, I need to say that this night offers good news in the strangest of places. It offers good news in the words Jesus speaks to his disciples after he shares his Last Supper with them. The good news, the healing word, comes, paradoxically, in the painful words Jesus speaks to those who have followed him and loved him. The good news comes in Jesus’ simple statement to his disciples, “You will all become deserters.”

Jesus is speaking the truth of his own heart. He has a clear sense of what lies ahead, and he has a clear sense of the frailties of the disciples who have followed him

throughout his ministry. He knows that his disciples' courage and faith will fail them at his hour of greatest need. He knows he will go alone into the custody of those who seek his death. He knows, as he says to his disciples, that they will all become deserters.

And what, my friends, does this ancient story tell us that Jesus does with this knowledge, this knowing in his own heart? Or, perhaps, *more* importantly, what does this story tell us that he does *not* do? He does not reject his friends and disciples. He does not condemn them for what he knows will be their failure to stand with him and to risk their own lives with his. He does not curse them, revile them, or cut them off.

What *does* Jesus do? He gathers with them, to share a meal and to share his last night in this life. He tells them the truth, that he will be betrayed. And then, in simple, powerful language, he offers them the bread and the cup, telling them that, in that simple meal, he is offering them the fullness of his life, the fullness of his blessing, and the fullness of his love forever. He is teaching them and he is teaching us that we are not required to be perfect to be held in God's love and grace, we are not required to be perfect to be faithful disciples, we are not required to be perfect to be in communion with the God who formed us in our mothers' wombs, who knows our names, and who loves us beyond all imagining.

So let us remember that we do not need to be perfect to come to this table. And let us join Jesus' disciples across the centuries and across the continents as we share this simple meal with him, with God, and with one another.

Amen.

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