A close up of a sign

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**February 23, 2020 – Will You Trust**

**Given by Rev. Mattei**

A woman had lost her purse in a shopping mall. Not only her money but also her driving license and credit cards were in it. She was on the brink of a panic attack when a child came over with what she realized was her purse. She was relieved by his honesty but still couldn’t help checking if everything was still there. When she looked inside the purse, she got a confused look on her face. “That’s funny,” she commented, “before I lost my bag, there was a twenty-dollar bill in it. Now I find two fives and a ten.” “That’s right, mam,” agreed the honest child. “The last time I found a lady’s purse, she didn’t have any change for a reward.”

Many of us live that way. We live in view of that reward, and our good deeds are tokens we use for a better outcome in the afterlife. Our mind seems preoccupied with earning points that hopefully will outnumber our negative thoughts, words, actions, and inactions, and protect us from eternal punishment, or at least reduce the sentence.

This underlying fear, anxiety, and guilt become our driving force and easily transpires in our dissatisfaction, uneasiness, and agitation, a way of being in the world that reveals our judgment of ourselves and others. Joy, happiness, simplicity, and serenity become hard to reach when we set out in pursuit of them under the auspices of a god we have interpreted to be a rule-giver and a judge. *That* god’s critical eyes and stern commands will never let us forget we are faulty creatures, broken and corrupt at the core. A quick scan of people’s cruel interactions with one another and the way we treat God’s creation is enough to get discouraged and feel hopeless. A demanding god can only offer forgiveness of our sins by sacrificing his son on our behalf so “his” (and this god is a *male*) wrath can be satisfied. We have learned to refer to this behavior as grace, but brutal vengeance can hardly be called grace.

I am certainly not advocating a lawless life. There is a place for the Law and for God’s judgment. God’s wrath is directed towards behaviors and life choices that dehumanize us. Life, as intended by God, in God, and for God, is not that way. A life lived not in harmony with God produces only death and destruction for anyone and anything it touches. Outside of the bounds of God, there is neither Love nor Life.[[1]](#footnote-1) The Son’s incarnation is not intended as a rescue plan after humans have abandoned God’s ways. It’s not Plan B after Plan A has gone off track. God did not need to provide a solution after creating imperfect beings.

The free will we have enjoyed from the beginning is a corollary of creative love. But that freedom is intended for God’s love responses to Love which is constantly calling us into a relationship. When we truly *know* Love, we are empowered to love back. Then we shall know the light of Wisdom, the healing power of Truth, and the enticing attraction of Beauty.

Wisdom cannot be limited to intellectual knowledge nor to self-referencing. Truth cannot be angry, antagonistic, or forced on anyone, or it will inherently distort the message (as the common belief in a punitive God has done for centuries). And Beauty cannot be seen in relative terms, it cannot be tribal, exclusive, and discriminatory as when we insist that one group of people is superior to another, or one country more important than another.

The scope of the Son’s incarnation was to show us the true nature of God and ours; to free us through the gift of spiritual insight so we could make wise choices; and to guide us on the path of transformation and liberation from our sin of separation acted out of ignorance. The Christian path is about personal transformation, or “metanoia” as the Greeks would say. Transformation is fundamentally different than information. Christian Education may inform us but transformation comes through discipleship.

While information may be formative, it may also puff up one’s ego and lead to control issues, transformation is based on humility and the willingness to surrender all control. Knowledge of God’s Law and obedience to God’s commands become grace, and one’s will is made totally free.

Are you still with me? At the end of a worship service, a woman spoke to her new pastor. She said, “I am deaf, and I can’t hear a word you say, but I still come to get my plate full.” Hoping to console, the pastor offered, “Well, maybe you haven’t missed much.” At which she replied, “Yes, that’s what they all tell me.”

This is what Jesus has called his disciples to witness on Mount Tabor. On his way towards Jerusalem and his crucifixion, Jesus wants to impress on us what he’s made of and what we are called to discover and express out of ourselves. Created out of Love and for Love, our God pulls us from a future that finds its beginnings at the time we were conceived in God’s mind. “Love is luring us forward, because love is what we already are at our core, and we are naturally drawn to the fullness of our own being. Like knows like.”[[2]](#footnote-2) From the future, God can see the whole and complete picture of Christ in us. The metanoia of transformation is our maturing in Christ not unlike an acorn promising a sturdy oak. The acorn’s potential is stored in its DNA and its future success is based on replication of the past. The fulfillment of our core being is guaranteed in this life...or in the next, depending on how much resistance we offer to God’s love, and how much we are attached to our own plans and agendas. Even “good intentions” could slow our journey down, resembling what Peter suggested to do on the Mount (Matthew 17:4). Getting attached to our good ideas or ways of doing things may distract us from the overall picture. We need to learn to let them go.

So, given all that, I suggest it all starts from a healthy acceptance of who we are, embracing even and especially our shadow, the parts of us we do not like.[[3]](#footnote-3) When we do that, we keep the spiritual channels open and learn to see what we despise and don’t want to see. Then, we discover that God is already loving what we try to hide away, push way down, fight in ourselves and in others. Often, if we really pay attention, we dislike in others what we dislike in ourselves. It’s helpful to remember that when we are intolerant of others it is because we are intolerant of our own mistakes and shortcomings. We treat with contempt and speak harsh and unforgiving words to one another because in the secret of our chambers we treat ourselves with contempt and unforgiveness. Is that perhaps why Jesus recommended to go to our room to pray to our Father in secret?[[4]](#footnote-4)

When I feel discouraged and become harsh with myself, it’s nice to know that my Lord forgives and there is acceptance, redemption, and liberation for me down the path, then everything else is put into perspective.[[5]](#footnote-5) It is only through love that we can be transformed and have a chance at transforming the dynamics in our interpersonal relationships. That realization moves us into new ethics, a generous life, stewardship of our body, our relations and our world.

May the God of new life bless us in the new Lenten Season which is about to start, that our journey towards Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection may transform our hearts and allow us to see how much we are already loved. Amen.

1. Romans 12:2; 1 John 4:8; 1 John 5:20 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Adapted from Richard Rohr, Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self (Jossey-Bass: 2013), 90-91, 92-93. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.awakin.org/read/view.php?tid=925> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Matthew 6:5-6 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Psalm 2 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)