

Sermon
April 14, 2024

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I want to invite us all to come to this text first as human beings. And so this morning, as you were preparing yourself to get out of bed and get moving; if you were having a cup of coffee and you were thinking about what could be different in your life to make today different, better than yesterday; perhaps you were musing over discontent, or maybe a disagreement you might have had, or might still be having, or disappointments.

We all have these things that we carry with us. (If you *don't* carry these things with you, can you please raise your hand and we're going to come see you after the service to find out how you live your life! Okay, good. Okay. I don't see any raised hands. So therefore, I think I can continue with this sermon that most of us in the room.)

So I want you to think about these things that you carry with you. What are you holding onto? Maybe it's a part of your family history, and you wish that things were different for you or for your loved ones, your family story; maybe it's something that's happening at work, or in your neighborhood and there's a disagreement that's happening, that you're really pretty sure that if somebody else would just do something different it would be better; or maybe yourself, maybe you're blaming yourself; maybe there's just a vague sense of discontent in your life.

Take these things that you're holding onto in this moment to think about that. And you won't have to tell anybody about it; just to hold it in your heart.

Again, if you haven't thought of something, or you don't have anything, please raise your hand and self-identify so we can find out how to live a better life after service. But other than that—everybody's going to have the opportunity to engage with a neighbor. I'm used to preaching in a very relational kind of way. So, I'm going to ask you to do something kind of fun. So, if you are sitting by yourself, you're gonna have to get up and move. You'll need to go to somebody next to you, and you're going to say some words. You may not even believe them yet, but the words are these:
"Neighbor, you don't have to hold on, and there's a new direction."

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Okay, so everybody stand up, find a place, find a person. You may not know them, it's okay.

You know I've been thinking about these words, and you know, how often do we think about the words that have been spoken in this room this morning, this text from Luke? How many millions of times have people who are followers of Jesus heard these words: that there is repentance and forgiveness in the name of Jesus, and that it is to be

proclaimed? You know, I think probably that this text in Luke has been read in Christian community millions and millions of times.

But today, I want to return to what it might have been like to hear these words from Jesus *for the very first time*; for those disciples who were gathered after the crucifixion. This is just after Emmaus, where, you know, they were walking on the road and they're like, oh my goodness, how can all of these things be, and their hearts are heavy within them, and Jesus appears amongst them.

I think about the discontent, the disagreements, the disappointments that these disciples had. You know, think about all of their years of following Jesus, hoping that this would be the Messiah, the One who would bring peace, and that would kick out the Romans, and that things would be so much better for everybody – and then he's captured, and he's killed, and he's executed in a public way. Can you just imagine, in those terrible days after the crucifixion, what it might have been like to be the disciples hanging out in that upper room together? The self-recrimination, and the conflict with each other! "If only you had said something to Judas, and we had noticed earlier" ... "If only I had had that conversation with Jesus and told him 'no, really, you don't need to go to the cross.'"

"If only –"

I can only imagine the tension in that room and the disagreements that they were having amongst each other. Are you with me on this? Yeah. I don't think I would want to be up in that Upper Room with them. And into the midst of that fear and discontent and disagreement, Jesus shows up with them. And what's the first thing he says to them? Anybody?

"Peace be with you."

Because they were probably terrified, but also because they were probably arguing amongst each other. "Peace with you."

Hold on family. Calm down. Let's have a discussion here.

They're like, Oh, my goodness is Jesus – but is it Jesus? And then Jesus does something that's so "on-brand" that they're like, "Oh, of course, this is Jesus" – he wants to eat with them. Like "Oh, yeah, this guy wants to eat with us! It must be Jesus; that checks out, because Jesus is always wanting to go to a family gathering with food, right?" And there's always stuff about food with Jesus. Yeah, yeah.

And then Jesus does something that's also just completely in keeping with who he is. He sits down and he opens the scriptures to them and teaches them. I can only imagine their relief. "Oh, thank goodness; Jesus is here again to teach us what these scriptures mean because wow, so much that we don't know."

Then Jesus says these words that have been repeated and repeated. (Now my English teacher from high school would have said that this translation needed a little bit more work, because it's in the passive voice, and she would have wanted there to be an

active verb.) So we'll hear it again. Jesus says to them, "Repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in His name to all nations."

Who is going to be doing that proclaiming, folks? Who do you think? Who would vote who should do the proclaiming and go ahead and shout it out? Raise your hand and then shout it out. You can raise your hand and I'll call on you so they can hear you? Yeah. "All of us." Oh, goodness. You're reading that right into the text so beautifully! I love that. What do you think Jesus meant? And you might read about all of us. Anybody else want to give a guess?

Oh, everybody's on board. Okay, great. We'll keep going.

I think, also, Jesus is saying to these disciples, these followers of Jesus, that they've got a job to do. They've got a job to do, "to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins."

Now, in our world today, who are the people who are absolutely definitely supposed to proclaim this? Go ahead and point—Yep, right here. Yes, I own it. I have, you know, gone to seminary and I've thought about it; I prepared, and I am a trained preacher, and it is absolutely my job to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins and so is your pastor over there. Yes, you can absolutely point to Dan, who has said that he will also do this.

But friends, as Martin Luther also says that "it is the duty of the Christian to speak consolation to one another," part of his Explanation on Confession and Forgiveness. And friends, I don't know about you, but I kind of need more than just a Sunday morning reminder of repentance and forgiveness of sins. I can't make it a whole week without disappointing somebody, even if it's just myself, but also God. And so, I can get through a day, and get to the end of the day, and think, "Oh my goodness, things; I am really off track here. How am I going to get back on track?"

And sometimes it's a word of a friend who says to me, "You don't have to carry this alone." And "You are loved." And "There is the possibility of something different." Maybe there's a possibility of some difference here.

Because actually those words of repentance and forgiveness of sins, those are pretty loaded terms for us Christians these days. Yes. Are you with me on this? How many of us had people who in our lives who were like "You must repent!" You must repent. And it's judgy; it's a judgy, stern word. And personally, when someone says "you must repent,"

I get rebellious, and I'm like, "I am doing no such thing." (Okay, that's just me? Great.)

The word "repentance" comes from the Latin for "redo." Do it over again.

And, I don't know about you; I think about the signs that you sometimes see in like, I'm thinking about a mechanic's shop that I used to go and sit in, they had like all the signs up on the walls. You know, the kind of place? It had this sign that said, "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a

different result.” Have you ever seen this sign before? I think about that when I think about the word repentance in Latin “to do it over and over again.” And I haven’t really *changed*. I haven’t really taken a new direction, so, I’m just going to be going over the same thing over and over again, and getting the same result. I’m like stuck in these grooves, you know, and I’ve worn those paths so hard, that I’m just gonna get stuck in that same groove, over and over again.

But the *Greek* word for this that gets translated into “repentance” in English, the Greek word is so much better. Let me tell you about it. It’s so much better. It’s *metanoia*. Now, has anybody heard *metanoia* before? *Metanoia*. Yeah, okay, good. We’ve got some people who are already on board with this word. This word *metanoia*. I’m going to show it to you so you can remember: you’re waling and waling and walking and whoo – you’ve got a new direction your new direction, and it comes from a change of your mind.

Metanoia is “taking a new direction” You’re in that groove, and you’re in that groove, and then you’re in that groove and then *metanoia*, in Jesus’ name, is Jesus coming along beside you, or behind you, and taps you on the shoulder, and says, “Okay, now it’s time to turn, now it’s time to take a new direction.”

Now what helps us to make that turn? What helps us to listen to that voice? I think the clue comes from the next word: “forgiveness.” And we’ve heard a lot about forgiveness, right, “forgive and forget,” like, “let bygones be bygones.” And maybe you’ve heard that you should forgive people over and over and over in your life, and maybe you’re not ready to, and maybe that’s okay.

I want to tell you about the Greek for forgiveness, because this is another fantastic word. Everybody, take your fist, hold it up and hold it tight. And like a physical therapist, I’m gonna have you squeeze it even tighter. Hold it really tight, really, really tight...

And then you open it and let go. Oh. You feel that relief in your hand? You hold that fist really, really tight for so long, and when you open your hand, it might take you a minute for those muscles to relax, but when you do, oh, isn’t that just glorious? When your muscles relax? The freedom in that!

The Greek word for forgiveness is “to let go;” *aphiemi*. Let go.

There’s this song that we sing at Holden Village. We do a lot of song circles. I learned this from our community member, Grace; she sings the song. It goes like this:

[...]

You don’t have to carry

the weight of the world in your soul and your heart.

Let go, let go, let go.

There’s another part to it.

Crying out to God,
Holy Love and Holy Flame
will you ease, will you ease this pain?"

When we have that fist tight, we've got some pain – spiritually, emotionally, sometimes even physically – we can hold that lack of forgiveness in our bodies. In that song, I hear God calling me to let go, let go, let go.

About a year ago, I was still living a very different life from where I am now. I was up in Maine. Now I'm from the Pacific Northwest. I was living in Maine for seven years. I was working as a hospital chaplain, and I worked in that hospital all through COVID, and I was really good at the job that I did, which was helping families at the end of life with children and babies. I did that all through COVID and it was really hard. I have a lot of gray hairs. I earned every single one of them. It was so hard to leave that job, not because I didn't want to leave. I was *scared* to leave, and I didn't want to leave my team, and I knew that if I left, that they would be without somebody who knew how to help people in end of life, in this really tricky time. Maybe you have feelings like this, too, where you're like, "Oh my gosh, I can't leave this situation that's so hard for me, even though I'm disappointed, or I'm discontented, or I've got disagreements, or this just isn't life-giving for me." Because you're holding on, for whatever reasons. You've got your own reasons for why you're stuck in the groove.

And again, maybe it's not your job. Maybe it's a family situation, or you're in the family patterns and you're like, "Oh my gosh, you know, I'm watching myself turn into my dad or my mom, or that person, making all the same mistakes," stuck wearing that groove down, over and over and over again. Holding on tight in fear, because, "what happens if I go to therapy and I start to look at those things again, and look in the mirror and I think oh gosh, it's me, right?" We've all had those moments. *Where* we have those moments is different, but we all have those moments. We're not alone in that.

Jesus says you don't have to carry the weight of the world in your muscles and bones. Let go, let go, let go.

Now why do you think Jesus says that to us? Because I think Jesus does say that to each one of us. I think Jesus looks at you, and says, "You are my beloved." "You are so dear to me, and I see you, and I see your mistakes, and I see the places where you're stuck, and I see the things that you do when you don't want to do them.... And I love you through it all and you're so dear to me. I want you to have abundant life." Jesus says, "You're my favorite. (Don't tell anybody else.)" Jesus longs for abundant life for us. Jesus sees how hard we hold onto things out of fear. Jesus longs for us to come with honesty, trusting in his love for us, to let go, and to see what the new direction might be.

Because here's the other thing: Jesus looks at us and believes in us. And Jesus also looks at our neighbors, our loved ones, our siblings. Jesus regards *them also* with love

and hope for abundant life. That person you're in conflict with at work, is *also* Jesus's favorite! (Don't tell anybody.)

God loves each person and longs for us to have abundant life, that new direction that we can't seem to get to on our own. Jesus is right there alongside us, loving us, wishing us to let go of that pain. Saying, "Okay, turn now. Okay, now. Okay, another turn, turn now," because Jesus looks at us and knows how much we're carrying and suffering. Jesus longs for us to know that love, and for that love to be given to every person around us.

When we get up in the morning, every day, we have a chance to think about what we're going to center in, the stories we're going to tell to ourselves about who we are, and whose we are. We can look in the mirror and we can think, "Oh, I'm turning into the person that I don't want to be." Or we can look in the mirror and we can say "No matter what's happened, no matter what I've done, or not done, I am beloved. Worth believing in. Two different narratives. I want you to hold again in your mind, the discontent, the disagreement, the disappointment that came to your mind at the beginning. Are you ready? We're going to go back into it for a moment

Clench your fist really tight. Hold on to that discontent in your fist... Now, let it go.

"Neighbor, you do not have to hold on. There is a new way, in Jesus' name."

Turn to your neighbor and proclaim it – really, truly proclaim it, to each other:

"Neighbor, you do not have to hold on, and there is a new direction, or there is a new way."

Go ahead and say it to each other like you mean it.

Let us give thanks and praise to Jesus, who gives us a new direction and loves us, even when we're stuck in ruts.

Thanks be to God.