



SPIRIT IN THE DESERT

Matthew 22:34-46

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: “What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.” He said to them, “How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying,

‘The Lord said to my Lord,
“Sit at my right hand,
until I put your enemies under your feet”’?

If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?” No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

Grace and Peace to you from the mystery in whom we live, move and have our being.

When we practice communal sharing of the bread and drink is when broken meets broken.

When broken meets broken, we bind together in the Jesus narrative. When we welcome all who will come, we welcome the Jesus we love that we see in others.

Jesus experienced Spirit as a person. At the table experience Jesus tells of his experience in Spirit that is to come.

Never has there been a time when one of us shared with certainty, a future narrative. But Jesus did just this with those he had shared a collective narrative of life, death, heartbreak, and perpetual letting go of ego.

Jesus and his disciples shared incredible collective narratives that involved healings, resurrections, joy, and suffering. Things that John says in John 21:25 could not be expressed in all the world’s books put together.

From then on, every time the disciples broke bread, they held those experiences communally. They remembered the events of the revelation of God's compassion who accompanied them on this earth. They also held their individual experiences which led to this collective moment. Their own lives of poverty, marginalization, and journey away from oppressive occupations.

The table sharing also carries the stories of past generations whether consciously or unconsciously. Remembering, shapes our present and future collective behavior.

Those who held others captive in Egypt, for Germans the holocaust, for Americans the intern camps, Vietnam, slavery, and today's violence toward immigrants to name just a very few. We must remember our redemption from being both oppressors and the oppressed. We are all part of the good and bad of humanity.

We remember in the light of Jesus being led by Spirit to self-sacrifice. Honoring the suffering of humanity and forgiving its deeds to create a new healing and collective narrative of renewed love.

Narratives that must be told and never forgotten with an on-going transformation of love never to repeat our human penchant for these evils again.

What will we do instead? What will we fill the space left when anger, hatred, jealousy, and shame are purged by our brokenness and the brokenness of Christ?

This is all contained in the two commandments Jesus gave to love God with every part of ourselves and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

What happens when the narratives are not remembered? When they are not told to the next generation? Then we are in danger of bypassing the second commandment to love neighbor and become people of the first commandment alone. We experience only '*ephemera*' as Walter Bruggeman says; people of the moment.

When this happens, practices like communion, are endangered of becoming ephemeral experiences. They become merely ritual and do nothing for the collective behavior of a community. It means we have latched on communally to the first commandment and abandoned the uncomfortable second.

In community we are bound together with story. We heal together with story, and that has been the purpose of the Touchpoint. To retell the stories of Jesus as they intersect with our stories.

This is what our brother Jim Hanson created, and Eric Simonson nurtured with the weekly Wednesday contemplative service.

Spirit in the Desert will continue to be a space made for storytelling, healing, and respite for visiting retreats like Healing of Memories bound together through the telling of their stories, one to another.

It is my personal mission statement to help others find meaning in their life stories and I look forward to creating new spaces for the Community of the Wild Goose to remember and retell stories of liberation from substances, toxic relationships, cultish ideologies, and religious legalism.

We are and will always be together the family and the children of God. One big flawed awkward church called humanity where everyone belongs. Our institutions like the ELCA are places where we can tell the narrative of Jesus as it intersects with our stories.

Here are the words of the Lutheran theologian Jürgen Moltmann, whose book *The Spirit of Life* became my closest companion during the COVID-19 pandemic and my cancer treatments.

“The community experienced could be understood as essentially a narrative community. The experiences that confer community and the experiences shared in community have to be told again and again in ever new ways, and in accordance with new situations, because they create a bond and open up opportunities for experiencing what is both mutual and personal. Every generation in Israel should see itself as if it had come out of Egypt says the midrash. Narrative communities are shaped by the recalling and making present of their common origin, and by the shared voyage of discovery into memories. An astonishing fact here is that we do not merely relate shared experiences over-and-over again in ever new ways, community is built up over the generations too, by way of the continual repeating of telling stories about family and folk. The social community existing at any one time is only one side of the narrative community in the temporal sequence of the generations. The other side is a world which stresses only the horizontal social links, threatens to erase tradition, and this also means demolishing the ties binding the generations together. If only two generations- parents and children- live together, and if even they are separated in space and time then humanity's memory will be lost and all that will be left will be people of the moment.”

Over the years this has helped me to understand the two commandments of Jesus as well as his refusal to answer the Pharisees question about lineage and Lordship.

The vertical beam of the cross is a reminder that we are utterly dependent on God. The horizontal beam is a reminder we are interdependent with others.

Jesus said on these two commandment beams, hang all the law.

Jesus took the laws to the cross with him. Both died but only the narrative of Christ with the two commandments rose. We cannot have one commandment without the other. It is as Moltmann says, “God-neighbor” as One.

Amen

A personal note from Henry to the Touchpoint community,

It has been such a wonderful journey of discovery providing the Touchpoint. I want to thank my dear friend Jim Hanson for his love and friendship entrusting his legacy at Spirit in the Desert to me for these last couple of years. Thanks to Eric Simonson for his leadership and passion for this place and for his partnership that will continue with our 10-year Community of the Wild Goose experiment. To the board for allowing me to speak into their meetings with a devotion and for believing in me. To the hard-working staff, particularly Denise, and Chef Karl, who have been more than co-workers, they are now dear friends.

Special thanks to Jamie for getting it out to everyone each week! I appreciate you!!

A blessing of new beginnings for Rika and Rob as they guide the work of Spirit in the Desert. May this place bless you both as it has me and so many others. I look forward to new opportunities of collaboration!

Finally, to the precious community I got to hang out with each week via Zoom. I loved the camaraderie, the sharing, the laughter, and occasional holy heckling! I will cherish the insight and support you brought to every conversation. I will miss seeing your faces every Wednesday at 3 pm!

I will continue the work of Community of the Wild Goose for sustained recovery and spiritual transformation as well as continue my spiritual direction practice.

Never forget the message that you have an irrevocable belonging, and God loves you nakedly without your mask!

Dios te bendiga!

Henry Rojas