



# The Inclusive Community

April 11, 2010

Theological Worlds for Lent - II

Ezekiel 36:24 - 28 I Corinthians 3:10 -15 John 17:20 - 26

Homily of Rev. Dr. George McDonald

When I tell people my name, they usually respond, "Oh, that John, the beloved disciple!" I smile at them; little do they suspect how long it took for me to be comfortable with that title.

I guess it was my youthful enthusiasm. You see, I was the youngest of Jesus' inner circle. We took the teaching of the prophets very seriously when they wrote about caring for the poor and needy. I've been poor all my life. Our parents died when we were very young. After that, my brother, James, and I worked on the fishing boat of Simon, whom Jesus called Rocky. When Jesus called Simon to follow him, Andrew, his brother, and James and I, went along, too. After all, I never wanted to be a fisherman. James and I had bigger dreams. We were going to build a new society.

In my naiveté, I just knew that Jesus was the Messiah promised by God to restore the lost kingdom of David. It was obvious that he was even more familiar with the scripture than we were. So I loved it when Jesus quoted from Jeremiah:

Amend your ways and your doings, and let me dwell with you in this place. Do not trust in these deceptive words: "This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord." For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors forever and ever. Here you are, trusting in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, "We are safe!" - only to go on doing all these abominations? Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your sight?"

Another of my favorites was Amos, who denounced those who were at ease in Zion, who lay on beds of ivory, and ate lambs from the flock, and calves from the stall; who sang idle songs to the sound of the harp, and like David improvised on instruments of music; who drank wine from bowls, and anointed themselves with the finest oils, but were not grieved over the ruin of Joseph! That was not what the people of God were meant to do! They had to change -- and fast!

Then Jesus went after the Pharisees. "I've had it with you Pharisees, you hopeless frauds! You keep meticulous account books, tithing on every nickel and dime you get, but manage to find loopholes for getting around basic matters of justice and God's love.

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I had heard of Jesus long before we met him. The first thing I heard about him was that he talked a lot about the kingdom of God. But following him, I realized that he talked even more about love. It was as though he had a one track mind. "Love your enemies," he said. "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another."

I remember when we finally were on our way to Jerusalem. As we passed near a Samaritan town on our way south, James and I went on ahead to find a place where we could spend the night. At every inn in that town, we were told that they didn't cater to Jews in their inn. We reported back to Jesus. Then we asked if he wanted us to call fire to come down out of heaven and consume them? He got almost angry when we suggested that! But, how were they ever to going to change if they didn't have to change? and very rapidly! That was when Jesus started mocking us, calling us The Thunder Boys! James and I were tempted to leave, but we didn't. Jesus needed us!

You see, Jesus had absolutely no organizational sense. I guess he thought it just happened. It's been almost sixty years since he was killed, and the church still doesn't have a consistent form of government. James and I offered to be his right- and left-hand men. From those positions, we could have whipped the church into shape, and left Jesus free to be its spiritual leader. He ignored us. And the other disciples, when they heard us talking, got angry, jealous. They never would let us do what we knew we could do well. The only opportunity Jesus ever gave me to show my leadership skills was leading the donkey on which he rode into Jerusalem.

As I said, Jesus mostly talked about love -- love, love, love. "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." he told us. "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

I guess I never understood the power of love until I stood with Jesus' mother, Mary, at the foot of the cross. He looked down at us from up there, teeth clenched against the inescapable and excruciating pain, and through cracked lips he nodded at me, and then said to her, "Woman, here is your son." Then he looked at her and said to me, "Here is your mother." From that moment, I experienced love in a new way. We needed each other. We belonged to each other.

Slowly, through Jesus, I understood the power of love to change the course of history. For the kingdom of God cannot be ushered in by force, or argument, or fear. The divine commonwealth is not governed by people who are supposedly as perfect as God, chosen by people who were appointed by another supposedly as perfect as God, to teach us supposedly imperfect people to obey all the rules established by those who are supposedly as perfect as God.

The divine commonwealth is not about obedience. It is about freedom, freedom from the law, freedom from the flesh, in order that in a world apparently enslaved by law and flesh, we may be free to obey the Law of Love -- that we may be responsible to Life itself for the world in which we live and move and have our being.

Jesus said that when we love, the world would hate us. So it has always been! The rulers of the people make rules for us to obey. They want us to answer to them for the way we obey their law.

In the divine commonwealth, however, we are called to freedom, to account to God for the way we have loved the world in which we live.

The world makes rules and laws, and demands our obedience until we die.

In Christ's commonwealth, because he loved us first, we are invited us to live in love, to live lives which participate in eternity.

The world is interested in "me and mine," here and now.

In love, the Body of Christ stands intentionally between the no longer and the not yet. They work with the One who said, "Behold, I make all things new!" Out over the abyss, with their own lives their only tools, they build signs of hope, new ways of being human, together, for all people. And those committed communities of creative lives, those deeds of faith and hope and love, even now are a part of the new world which is coming into existence all around us. Even now, and as far as history shall run.

Without love, we are nothing. If we do not have love, we gain nothing. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love is eternal; it never ends.

You see, the only power to transform the world is the power of love.

Since I am the last one alive who actually knew Jesus when he was here on earth, it has become the custom whenever I go to a church gathering, for me to say a few words. I slowly get to my feet - I'm over 80! I always say the same words, "Beloved, let us love one another!"

The younger ones suspect that I am touched or totally senile. That's OK. I had similar thoughts about Jesus, when he was only thirty!

Humans will always tinker with making things "better." Now, however, I see that love alone has the power to bring in that new heaven and new earth, the New Jerusalem. Only love can truly care for the widow and the orphan, the sick and diseased, the outcast and the stranger. Only the selfless love of God, imbedded in the very structure of the universe can truly create new structures of society which insure humanness itself.

So, before I close, let me simply share with you, "John is not the only beloved disciple. We all are beloved disciples. Therefore, let us love one another, because love is from God."

And the People of God said, AMEN