Fourth Sunday of Easter

John 10: 22-30

Division among believers is a gospel theme today. Today’s verses are part of what is known as the Good Shepherd discourse. They highlight the fact that there were two ways of looking at Jesus’ words. His identity, origins and authority were a cause of division. I wonder how things have changed? How much have we learned from Jesus’ teaching? Do we honestly take it to heart?

Jesus said those who do not believe in him are not his sheep, they do not know his call. The signs and wonders that Jesus did in his Father’s name were not accepted by some.

Today’s gospel highlights tension between God’s initiative and human responsibility and perhaps that isn’t resolved in a life-time or over the whole gospel. It is only with the eyes of faith that we see the truth concerning Jesus. As a priest and preacher I can’t argue people into acceptance of Jesus’ teaching. And perhaps I can’t even successfully urge you to consider what impact it might have on your life.

I may be able to help you discern the Shepherd’s voice among many. The voice of the shepherd liberates. Jesus said “I came that they may have life abundantly” (John 10:10). It may not be in wealth status or accomplishment. But it may be in love that overflows to others.

I want to talk about faith and hostility. I will be somewhat controversial here and say that the most serious enemies of Christ wear his name. Some preach love without loving. [[1]](#footnote-1)

What does it mean to hear his voice and to follow him? This call is about profound intimacy. Jesus says “I give eternal life to them they will never perish” (John 10:28). There is a unique security offered by Jesus. No one will snatch them (us) out of Jesus’ hand.

This isn’t insurance of an easy life. Many will die for their faith or lose their jobs or be denied opportunity or suffer ridicule. What they will not lose is their relationship to the Father and Son and the salvation that relationship brings. But why was this teaching so inflammatory?

You see the people of Jesus’ time had trouble listening beyond their traditional teaching and experience. And so do we. They didn’t understand what Jesus was telling them because they held to a particular frame of reference. The old paradigm. In fact, we face the same difficulty. We do know the end of the story we have Jesus own words and we can piece together his words and actions and we know about the Resurrection, but I wonder how many of us are stuck in an old way of thinking about our faith. How many of you are truly ready to embrace growth?

Just a word on paradigm shift. Something I addressed in my Ph D research. When new information or experience appears alongside old beliefs we can try to ignore it and press on. However, as contrary experience and information or data continues to mount we may find the old beliefs or pattern no longer reflect reality. The old framework is challenged by disparate information. The paradigm has to change. Thomas Kuhn is the scientific writer who describes phenomenon of Paradigm Shift[[2]](#footnote-2).

So I wonder how equipped you are for letting go of old ways of think about your faith. I am going to talk about about a model I introduced to you almost a year ago. It is Francis Dorff’s pattern for spiritual growth[[3]](#footnote-3). He proposes the steps in change or paradigm shift of: Letting go in trust, letting be in hope, and letting grow in love and so, passing over.

This pattern can be applied in any part of scripture or any biblical narrative and any part of our own story.

I want to say something about being a priest. I am just Linda. But there are times in my priestly role that I step into liminal space at the edge. In that role I become more than Linda. My hands are not magic. But when I lift them to God and ask for the coming of the Spirit I become a conduit; a mediator. For this reason, it is important for me to pray for a contrite heart. I say at the ablutions before the great Thanks-giving Prayer. “Lord, cleanse me of my iniquities and wash away my sin that I may be worthy of this Holy Sacrament”. I am not without sin. I have failings and blind-spots but it is very important for me to keep my sin always before me.

When I move into liminal space I am holding that place open for the Holy Spirit. This takes my intellect and energy and my heart. I believe it is the greatest privilege any person could experience. I will never take it for granted. So I know my limitations and I have explained something of the process of knowing what is happening in and around me in my priestly role. Now I want to turn to what participation in the Eucharist, the Mass, or The Lord’s Supper and what it means for you.

Does it nourish and sustain? Does it challenge and unsettle? Does it do both of these things? Do you know your preference in terms of learning style? I know I am an experiential learner. Others may feel more at home with their intellect.

Some years back I read a wonderful theological book which explained the power of ritual. This was its thesis. A ritual moves us from the place of the known to the unknown. To put that in other words if we enter ritual fully, it moves us into liminal space. We are at the edge of what is known and familiar and we are ready to be changed. We don’t know what will happen.

Dorff gives this wonderful explanation of the Messianic heartbeat[[4]](#footnote-4) that underpins life. He tells the story of a young boy Mordechai. A beautiful young boy doted on by his parents. He had one flaw. He refused to study the Torah. In desperation they took him to the a great rabbi who asked them to leave the child with him. The great rabbi lay down and asked the child to come and lie with him. No words were spoken. The parents collected the boy the rabbi said he had been taught a lesson he will never forget. Mordechai grew up to be a great Rabbi who said. I first learnt to read the Torah when the great rabbi held me silently against his heart. The message for us, stoop low, open ourself and get rid of our personal agenda. If we are busy thinking your thoughts nothing new can come in. What would we hear if we listened beneath the words of scripture; of the whole bible?

I will conclude with one example of application of Dorff’s steps that may encourage growth.

People’s hopes began to rise, and they began to wonder whether John perhaps might be the Messiah. So John said to all of them. “I baptise you with water, but someone is coming who is much greater than I am”.

(Letting go in trust)

“I am not good enough even to untie his sandals”.

(Letting be in hope)

“He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire”. Luke 3: 15-17

Later in John’s gospel we hear these words.

“He must become more important while I become less important”. John 3: 30

This last stage is about letting grow in love and passing over. [[5]](#footnote-5)

How ready are you to listen to enter liminal space, to listen to the heartbeat and pass over?

References

Dorff, F. 1988 *The Art Of Passing Over* Integration Books Paulist Press New York

Johnson, J. Commentary John 10: 22-30 WWW.

Kuhn, T. 1962 *The Structure Of Scientific Revolutions* Chicago University of Chicago Press

1. Johnson, E. Commentary on John 10: 22-30 WWW April 17 2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Kuhn, T. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* Passim. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Dorff, F. *The Art of Passing Over* passim [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Dorff, F. *The Art of Passing Over* pp22-24 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Dorff, F. Op Cit p28 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)