August 28 2022

Luke 14: 1 (2-6) 7-14

Today’s gospel begins with a repetition of last Sunday’s theme. Is it right to heal on the sabbath? Jesus’ intention was to call into question the stern rule-bound approach which could cause people to suffer. Jesus’ attention was for the alleviation of real-world problems.

With that in mind we come to another challenging teaching on humility. We are given the example of the wedding guest who chooses a place above their station which they may be called upon to give up. Put succinctly the last will be first and the first will be last. This teaching essentially calls us to consider how we deal with being humbled. It can be a hard pill to swallow!

I am going to link this gospel to the idea of wholeness in both spiritual and psychological terms. Last week; with the proposition that our wholeness is within and that God has already dreamed that fullness in us. Our task is to uncover what is already present. But how?

Firstly, we have to get over the hurdle of our personal shadow. In Jungian terms these are the parts of the self we want to cut off and disown. In other words what we hide from others, jealousy, anger, avarice and so on. Undesirable qualities live in all of us. If we come to psychological growth, we acknowledge these traits and integrate the power that they have held over us. In today’s gospel terms we know that we covert the place of honour at the banquet but accept the lesser place because we aspire to embrace Jesus’ teaching. So shadow work is on on-going growth trajectory.

What is its spiritual equivalent? What am I on about when I keep telling you that God’s fullness is within how to we realise it? I use realise in two ways that is as in actualising as in making real as well as coming to awareness.

You see, the Word of God actually becomes the language of our hearts. Whatever we might learn about God is somehow transmuted through language and or our feelings. Last week I talked about how the words of our liturgy create images in me. That is because I am a lover of words. Brother Todd of the Society of John the Evangelist explains as you take the words of liturgy into your heart you may find yourself moved to sadness, joy, pity, compassion, or well-being or hope or any mixture of these emotions. If the words of liturgy are working in you something is happening in the internal world.

If you find yourself wondering about the morning cup of tea, or how you will deal with a family issue, the words may be washing over you. But I suggest they are seeping into your very cells despite your distraction.

The effect of the scriptures and liturgy may be sub-liminal but **they are** shaping our heart. This is the basis of the idea of **spiritual transformation**. It is the drip of water on a stone. Our hearts are not empty vessels. Our inner worlds are alive with images, memories, experiences and desires. Jesus’ voice ever leads us forward toward learning and growth. We have to do the spiritual and shadow work in order to emerge with new knowledge and understanding.

I believe Jesus was the first and greatest psychologist. He knew the human heart and mind thoroughly. How do we reach towards the learning proposed by our gospel? The path is not always clear and our understanding my stutter to birth. We might say two steps forward and one back. We may seek out growth-promoting reading or discussion. We may need a personalised spiritual mentor or director. Because we can’t always see God’s work growing out of our heart.

It is good to take note of the images emerging out of the present moment. Daniel O’Leary suggests we examine the moment of Communion because God is made human in the bread and wine.[[1]](#footnote-1)

I wonder if any of you have been shocked by some of the language I have used blessings in recent weeks. I’ve talked of blood. The birthing blood on the floor or the wall of a cave. It shocked me, but it also grounded me in the feeling that at Communion the incarnation of God comes to feed us in our flesh. This is about **The Body and your body**. It is in the Eucharist that we can bring our shadow-self to growth in the Spirit.

Daniel O’Leary says God’s love takes the intimate shape of our essential sensual and rawest selves. When we come to what he calls the table of truth, immediately after receiving Holy Communion, a vital assurance is whispered to us. ‘I am now the living food of your flesh. I am the vibrant vine of your energy, the power within you. In me you are made complete, and you are invincible, even in your darkest winter.[[2]](#footnote-2)

This is what St Symeon of the first Century tells us we can look for:

…everything that is hurt, everything

 that seemed to us dark, harsh, shameful,

maimed, ugly, irreparably

damaged, is in Him transformed

and recognised as whole, as lovely

and radiant in His light,

We awaken as the Beloved

in every part of our body.[[3]](#footnote-3)

I think it can be very hard for us to believe in this transformation. I close with an example. The week I was ordained I ministering to a colleague who was dying. I went to the hospital to pray with her. He husband was there. He held her hand as she lay in bed grasping a prayer cross. I prayed. I was conscious at the time of looking out for God in the room. As I prayed, I was seeking his presence. I was asking where are you Lord? The confusion I felt in that setting stayed with me for years until God revealed its meaning to me and it wasn’t what I expected.

Through prayer and my questioning God showed me that on that occasion it was I was standing in for God to these dear folk. In our liturgy and scripture we so often hear ‘blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’ At the time I didn’t understand my role. It was incomprehensible to me.

Transformation came to me through my heart and out of my heart I gave to others. Words had been being absorbed in my heart since my childhood as I am sure the words of scripture are working in you.

So, to learn and grow takes effort on our behalf. May we lean into God that he may continue transforming8 our hearts.

AMEN

References

Blackham, Br Todd SSJE The Word of God, in the language of our hearts – (<https://www.ssje.org/>)

O’Leary, D. *Treasured and Transformed* Garratt Publishing Victoria 2018

1. O’Leary, D p22 *Treasured and Transformed* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. O’Leary, Op Cit. p22 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Op Cit p23 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)