

## CHALLENGING CONVERSATIONS

8/30/20~ St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Encinitas, CA

Proper 17 (Year A): ~~Exodus 3:1-15~~; Psalm 105:1-6, 23-26, 45c; Romans 12:9-21; Matthew 16:21-28

This image of Peter and Jesus from our reading in Matthew always makes me giggle a little. The drama is so over the top! Jesus is trying to explain that he has to leave, and Peter cries out: "God forbid it...this must never happen." And, in response, Jesus shouts: "Get behind me, Satan!"

Poor Peter. His little heart must have broken into pieces. He's trying so hard to be a good disciple; he loves and trusts Jesus so much, and then Jesus calls him "Satan!" Can you imagine being accused of being evil by someone you love?

Of course, we know Jesus says this for the shock value; he wants Peter and the others to fully participate in this very important conversation. Jesus is going to leave, and he needs them to carry on his earthly ministry. They must come to understand that what's at stake is more important than their comfort; what's at stake is important enough that Jesus willing to risk his life to achieve it.

And you can't blame Peter. He likes things the way they are; it works for him. He doesn't want to have another uncomfortable conversation. In many ways, I think that's how most of us feel. We want the benefits of feeling God's abiding Spirit, and we want to help make the world a better place, but we don't want to have to have conversations about what else being a disciple of Christ might call us to do.

Not many of us willingly lean into such conversations. That's why there are oodles of books such as *Fierce Conversations*, *Radical Candor*, *The Discomfort Zone*, and lately, *Eloquent Rage* and *White Fragility*. Along those lines is a book I just finished reading, *So You Want to Talk about Race*.

The author explains she doesn't want to talk about race either, but that as a Black woman she's forced to think about race all the time, and she knows the only way things will change is if we're all willing to have difficult conversations. Because, if we don't talk about race, then we won't understand how we contribute to systemic racism, which means we won't be able to help bring about the systemic change that's needed.

I want to point out that this idea of systemic issues and systemic change, is nothing new. That's exactly what Jesus was talking about. He saw how systemic systems were keeping certain people oppressed...the widows, the orphans, the sick...anyone considered "other", so he said things to his followers like: "pick up your cross..." and "be willing to lose your life...". Jesus was calling for a systemic overhaul of society.

Yes, we're still fighting for equality and justice for all, but we don't give up just because it's been a long battle. Jesus calls us to respect the dignity of, and stand in solidarity with the oppressed.

The author Ijeoma Oluo, writes that when people complain, "Do we have to talk about race all the time?", she asks: "Do you believe in justice and equality?" And when they say, "yes, of course," she adds, "Then you believe in justice and equality for everybody all of the time."

When someone comes along and claims we all might be contributing to systemic racism, or that police brutality isn't just a couple of bad apples, but actually a product of systemic racism,

we, like Peter, might get defensive and shout out, “God forbid it!” But if we listen closely, we hear our revolutionary leader, Jesus, shouting back: “Get behind me, Satan!”

Jesus set out to change the system—to bring God’s love and peace to all. Likewise, as one of Jesus’ ardent followers, the Apostle Paul stresses to the early church community, in our reading from Romans: “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them...Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.” In other words, rather than trying to make others wrong, stand up for what is right and good.

In any of those books about challenging conversations, two pieces of advice are always present: 1) listen more than you speak, and 2) be curious. Being curious will help us all learn more about each other, and helps us avoid getting defensive or argumentative. Because the point of these difficult conversations is not to be the one who is right; the point is to be the one who helps affect positive change.

In my research this week, I came across a quote spoken by Frederick Douglass in 1845. He said: “Between the Christianity of this land, and the Christianity of Christ, I recognize the widest possible difference.” We’ve made some progress since 1845, but we have a long way to go to ensure equality in terms of health, wealth and safety for people of color in this country.

In fact, Virginia and I had a challenging conversation a few days ago. We debated changing some of today’s hymns, because they were purposefully chosen earlier in the month to help us feel upbeat. But what’s going on in our country right now, has us feeling like we should be wailing and lamenting as a church. And, we do wail, but we also come together as a community—whether in our cars or online—to be nourished and fed by God’s Word and God’s promise of hope, so we sing uplifting songs to prepare us for the week ahead.

Engaging in the tough conversations will lead to greater understanding, and then our understanding must lead to action. We can all do things to promote racial justice, such as asking your school’s PTA to have meetings at times when parents who have to work can attend; giving money to organizations who fight racial oppression; voting for candidates who do the same; and supporting businesses owned by people of color. You can Google “Things White people can do for social justice” to find more ideas.

Taking up our cross means getting outside of our comfort zone. Losing our life means we might have to question whether we really deserve all the nice things we enjoy, or if the color of our skin, our gender, our height, our access to a college education, even our good looks might have had more to do with it than how hard we worked. As we check our own privilege, we become allies, standing in solidarity, just as Jesus did, with those who deserve the same measures of equality and justice.

-Amen

## **The Collect**

Lord of all power and might, the author and giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of your Name; increase in us true religion; nourish us with all goodness; and bring forth in us the fruit of good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. *Amen.*

### **Exodus 3:1-15**

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain." But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.

### **Psalm 105:1-6, 23-26, 45c**

- 1 Give thanks to the LORD and call upon his Name; \*  
make known his deeds among the peoples.
- 2 Sing to him, sing praises to him, \*  
and speak of all his marvelous works.
- 3 Glory in his holy Name; \*  
let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.
- 4 Search for the LORD and his strength; \*  
continually seek his face.

5 Remember the marvels he has done, \*  
    his wonders and the judgments of his mouth,  
6 O offspring of Abraham his servant, \*  
    O children of Jacob his chosen.  
23 Israel came into Egypt, \*  
    and Jacob became a sojourner in the land of Ham.  
24 The LORD made his people exceedingly fruitful; \*  
    he made them stronger than their enemies;  
25 Whose heart he turned, so that they hated his people, \*  
    and dealt unjustly with his servants.  
26 He sent Moses his servant, \*  
    and Aaron whom he had chosen.  
45 Hallelujah!

### **Romans 12:9-21**

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

### **Matthew 16:21-28**

Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?"

“For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”