

“Lesson Six: Remember Whose You Are and Who You Are”

Lent V

Isaiah 43:16-21; Psalm 126; Philippians 3:4b-14; John 12:1-8
(“Life Lessons from Luke” #6 in a series of 9 sermons)

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From the Pulpit

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A sermon delivered by The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr. Minister, First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Lent V, April 7, 2019, dedicated to the memory of Shirley Calhoun, to all the 81 parents and children associated with my Lenten “Small” Group & always to the glory of God!

“Lesson Six:

Remember Whose You Are and Who You Are””

Isaiah 43:16-21; Psalm 126; Philippians 3:4b-14; John 12:1-8 (“Life Lessons from Luke” #6 in a series of 9 sermons)

On Ash Wednesday, March 6th, I shared a true confession. I confessed that the Lenten Sermon Series, “Life Lessons from Luke” actually had two lessons from John. Today’s gospel story is our second “Life Lesson from John.” It is simply this: *“Remember Whose You Are and Who You Are.”*

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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Our connections to family, place and our various origin stories really matter to us. “Who are you?”, “Who are your ancestors?”, “Where did they come from?”, “How did they come to this nation?”, “What does your DNA tell you?”

Many of us have stories of our roots that go deep and then stretch across this state, this nation, this world and many generations and cultures of people. We are mixed nationalities, mixed race, mixed tribes and lots of mixes of well-formed and sometimes sketchy traces through hundreds of years. Who we are matters to us.

Beyond these kinds of racial, cultural and scientific connections, we seek, **more significantly**, to know what kind of people we are in relation to those from whom we came. Were they compassionate? Were they kind and caring? Were they courageous and transforming people? What have we learned from them about the nature of who we are and who God calls us to be?

“Whose we are” also matters. Who are we in relation to God? Who are we in relation to a divine being beyond ourselves? For example, I identify myself as belonging to Christ and his presence in my life and in this world. I am His – first and foremost. Others of us may call ourselves a “Child of God” or a “spiritual being occupying a physical body.” The essence of **“whose we are”** and how we are connected to the Divine Presence in this Universe and to all creatures – great

and small - is even more complex than **“Who we are”** ever could be.

Today’s Gospel story brings Jesus to the end of his pre-passion; pre-crucifixion journey in John’s Gospel. We see him in his final days spending dinner with Lazarus – a man he just raised from the dead and his sisters, Mary and Martha. Lazarus is so newly out of the tomb and reentering the world that the smell of his tomb may still be lingering in the air around Bethany. Jesus is joined in this dinner party by his disciples. But it is Judas we hear most about...

Our teacher in this story is a woman. This happens quite often in the Bible, especially the Gospels, where those who are often seen in the first century as the last and the least seem to hit just the right note while the Apparently Chosen Disciples stumble and blunder their way along.

This anointing at Bethany, the home of Lazarus, isn't just a nice little story in the middle of John's Gospel. This story is literally and figuratively, the turning point of John’s Gospel. Jesus has turned his face toward Jerusalem instead of remaining a popular but mysterious and elusive troublemaker in the outlands, out of the reach of the religious authorities and the Roman Empire, Jesus is just a few miles from Jerusalem. He is coming to face his inevitable death and ultimately his resurrection.

Jesus’ raising of Lazarus from the dead, just a few verses before this passage, in chapter 11, has set into motion the

wheels of the machinery that will kill him in just a few six more days.

Isn't ironic that raising someone from the dead makes others want to kill you? In other words, the man of Nazareth, knowing exactly "who he is" and "whose he is" absolutely terrifies and threatens religious and political leaders by raising Lazarus from the dead. This story becomes a precursor to the Resurrection of Christ just a few chapters later.

Right in the midst of all of this anxiety, plotting, and threat, or perhaps in spite of it, Jesus' friends, Martha the earnest, hard-working hostess and her brother Lazarus, fresh from the tomb, and her sister Mary, the passionate one, throw a dinner party. Like the father in Luke throwing a party for his metaphorically dead son last week, it makes sense that it's "party time" when the Literally dead are back home and doing well. Why not celebrate the Resurrector when he stops by the house?

Jesus is able to "let his hair down." He is with friends. He is able to relax. He loves this "Last Party." So, it is even more disturbing that Judas, who doesn't care at all about the poor, begins to lecture Mary (and everyone else!) about doing the "wrong thing" when she anoints Jesus' feet and wipes the oil off with her hair. (I don't know about you – but I find it aggravating when someone who doesn't care about poor people lectures others about how they should care for the poor). Anyway, by unbinding her hair and wiping Jesus' feet, Mary does something that a woman in her culture would only

do at the death of her husband when in the midst of mourning. She unbinds her hair....

In all of this, Mary shows us who she is – one who shows extravagant love for Jesus. Jesus shows us who he is – one who is able to receive the love as well as share it with others. Judas shows us who he is – one who is threatened by love and grace; by kindness and true caring.

While the smell of death lingers in the air, and the look and the feel of resurrection sits across the table from him, the non-anxious Jesus soaks in the love of a friend and the fragrance of healing oil upon his tired and worn out feet, all while having to deal with Judas - the one who will betray him and wants him to rise up and lead a violent movement of change. Jesus reflects the divine nature of love and the truly non-anxious presence of God in this world. He shows us he is God's chosen one. He is God's beloved son. He knows exactly who he is and whose he is.

This story is a powerful reminder that we are ALL called to figure out who we are. We are all called to live into the fullness of who God calls us to be. We are all called to reflect the divine even if we do it by stumbling and struggling, by trial and error. We are all called to more fully and perfectly shine the light and love of God in this world. And when we see the love of God trampled and mocked, when we see God's light blown out in the name of darkness, we are called to stop this, change this and with gratitude and love in our hearts turn this around.

Each one of us needs to figure **who we are and whose we are.**

Today, let's come to the Lord's Table today in the Spirit of "The Last Party." That's right. Let's use our divine imagination as we come to the Table of God's Grace. A man has been raised from the dead and is now smiling, laughing and drinking deep the fullness of life. His sister, the hostess of the party, is down on her knees wiping the feet of her brother's Resurrector with her hair and the best anointing oil in town! This party is one where no less than extravagant love, fragrant gratitude and NEW LIFE are being celebrated. At this party, we see WHO people really are. We see WHOSE they are.

At this Last Party, we can discover some things about ourselves, too. Will we be the ones who sit off to the side and critique and criticize how this party is rolling along? Or will we be fully engaged as we seek to relate to the Lord of Life?

Who are You? Whose will You be?

These are not just questions thrown out in some sermon in April 2019 on the edge of Holy Week. These are questions which will define you and call you deeper in your celebration of life and then your embrace of Jesus as Lord and Savior of your life.

Come to the Table in the spirit of "The Last Party." Come and drink deep from the cup of love and blessing. Come and

receive the Bread of Life which fills you with resurrection joy.
Amen.

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