



Shaking it till the love comes on... (John 13: 31-35)

Many of you have asked me about our trip to Asilomar last week. Asilomar is beautiful, and I was able to spend some time reflecting and walking on the beach. The salty air was cool and damp, and the deer and birds were constant companions in the wooded area around our room. Although we were working a lot, we were doing it sitting around crackling fireplaces, breathing salty air, and sitting alongside good friends that I see way to infrequently. It is clear that it is an exciting time in the life of our region and the presenters and preachers were particularly interesting because there was much more talk about prayer and forgiveness, and connecting with God, and slowing ourselves down so we CAN be in relationship with God – things you all know are near and dear to my heart.

I made several connections, and had several wonderful experiences.. The first night, Christy and I shared dinner with Ruth Costello, her sister Jean, and Tina Heck who all send their love and two bags of hand sewn coverlets I was instructed to give "directly to Minta." Robert Lemon, who many of you know, received the first ever "Martin Luther King Junior Award" for his lifetime ministry in social justice. Patty Evans, a dynamic Pastor from Albany, Oregon, gave a wonderful sermon and workshop on praying and doing spiritual practices in our worship communities. Patty, interestingly enough, bore a resemblance to Doral Main. And the resemblance was striking enough that Doral was stopped and congratulated numerous times the rest of the weekend on her fine sermon. Because she is Doral, She finally gave up trying to explain that she wasn't Patty, and just said "Thanks very much."

But one of the things that stood out most for me the most happened in Sunday morning worship, when the children who had attended Asilomar came onto the dias to sing a song they had learned in their time together. There were about fifteen of them ranging from toddler to 7 or 8. The song was about letting the light of God's love shine through, and as they sang, each of the children had a flashlight that they shined on their faces in the darkened worship hall while they were singing. It was a wonderful creative liturgical idea but there was one little blonde guy down toward the end who couldn't get his flashlight to come on. And any of you who have worked with kids know something like this is highly possible when you have planned the most inspiring creative presentation imaginable. He fumbled with the switch and then looked at the end of the flashlight, and then fumbled with the switch and looked at the director. He fumbled with the switch and pulled on the boy's shirt next to him. And when the flashlight still wouldn't come on, he started to shake it.. then he would look at the end and shake it some more.

Well by this time, the entire assembly of 400 was focused on that little boy. Some were chuckling. Everyone was rooting for him to get that flashlight to come on as the children sang a song about "the light of God's love shining through us." And he shook it and he shook it and he shook it and finally it came on! And everyone in Merrill Hall applauded.



And then just as the assembly relaxed and the children launched into the next verse, faces all aglow, his flashlight went out again. So the little guy shook it, and shook it, and shook it some more until it came on again... Once again it came on again to thunderous applause. The metaphor was not lost on many. A woman I had met earlier leaned over to me and said "sometimes you just have to keep shaking it till the love comes on."

So I had to smile when I read our scripture for this morning which is John's "new commandment" scripture; the scripture from which we draw the idea of the "Day of the New Commandment" or "Maundy Thursday" our most sacred time of receiving Jesus' loving gift of the Lord's Supper.) It's the scripture in which John tells us that Jesus says "Little children...where I am going you cannot come. But I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

We are called to love each other. That is simple enough for even the kids to remember and sing about at Asilomar. But it also strikes me that it is profound enough that even the most well seasoned believer among us is probably repeatedly embarrassed at how poorly she/he puts it into practice on some days. And since the much older Hebrew Bible calls us in Leviticus 19:8 to "love your neighbor as yourself.. I am the Lord." There doesn't at first glance, seem to be much new about what Jesus is saying here. And yet there is something incredibly unique and very new about it. Let's take a closer look.

Jesus provides us a clear model of the love that he is after. "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" he tells us here. If we want to understand how to love as believers, we should look closely at Jesus' life and actions. The healings, the kindnesses, the integrity, the way he empowers others to follow their own calls with the passion and authenticity with which he followed his own...the boundary breaking tenderness shown to the woman who had hemorrhaged for 12 years, or to the Samaritan woman at the well as he empowered her as a sexual outcast to be a prophet among her people, and to Peter as Jesus led him to gaze into the charcoal fire on the beach on the sea of Galilee and let go of his betrayal and his mistakes so he could become the rock upon which the church would be founded.

The love we are called to here is a love of action that is deeply rooted in our own authenticity and relationship with God like Jesus' love was. The Greek word used here is "agape". Agape love is not abstract or distant or philosophical. Agape is an action word that means to "demonstrate or show love based on appreciation and high regard." Agape love calls us to be engaged and active just like Jesus was. So you may be saying "Pastor Jeanne, he could do that... He was Jesus... I am not Jesus. I can't be that authentic. I can't move with that kind of power in the world. I don't have the energy. I can't get into long conversations with strange people and I certainly can't let God use me to help heal anyone. Some days I don't even feel like getting out of bed because I am so tired, have so many things to do, have too much pain, or just don't want to fight the traffic." You can fill in the blank...)



Some of us are sitting in this sanctuary today having some trouble getting our lights to come on. And if we do manage to get our lights to come on they go back out because something is not connecting all the time. But there are some wonderful things we can do to shake ourselves up and make the connections stronger, and get the agape love light shining a little brighter so God can activate the rock, or prophetess in you that might just turn the world upside down. And if we all get our lights shining together we are going to be a force for the good news to be reckoned with in San Lorenzo.

The first active love spreading light shining connection making thing we are all called to do is pray. We did it during the Lenten season, and we are called to keep doing it. Pray with the scriptures (if you don't know how, come to Wednesday morning scripture and story group, or Martha, Betty, Virginia, Kaye, or Eleanor will show you...) Pray by making time for silence in your life. Pray with the beads. Pray "Lord Jesus Christ son of God have mercy on me" or Jesus Christ light of my life fill my mind with your peace and my heart with your joy" whenever you have a chance. Pray for your family, pray for everyone in our congregation. Pray for your neighbors. Get the cards out Thomas made for us during Lent and pray for all of those things. If you really feel adventurous and want to shake things up and get the light to stay on Pray that God will remove the things in your life that are keeping your light from shining. Pray for the guy that didn't get the order in until 4:45 when you are supposed to leave at 5:00. Pray for the teenage girl who is talking on her cellphone and ran over your foot with the shopping cart in Safeway. Pray for the woman who shares your office in the afternoon who does her nails in "Perky Pink" every time the boss leaves and fills your sinuses with the smell of nail polish remover...

The other thing to shake things up and make the connections so the light of God's love will shine brightly in you is to practice the art of forgiveness.. And this is closely related to prayer because you are going to need to ask for the strength to do it. We have talked a lot about forgiveness. And we have learned that we all have a tendency to get stuck at different places in our lives when we get hurt. We may get hurt or stuck on something when we are very young or it may have happened more recently. And whatever you have been hurt by may be something really hard. I don't want to stand up here and just say "let go of it" because the psychologist in me knows its more complicated than that. But a well rooted prayer life does make it easier to do...

One thing I want to clarify as we are working with the art of forgiveness... Many of you who come to me see me about the things you are struggling with struggle with this...Don't confuse letting go and forgiving yourself or someone else with saying "what you did is ok with me" because whatever he/she did is probably not ok and in some cases is right down awful. But for forgiveness to work, for you to free that energy up to move more authentically so you can follow the example of Jesus Christ, you have to forgive that person or yourself enough so you can focus your energy on something else and remember that we all make big mistakes in our lives from time to time. When we get stuck and can't forgive, the irony is that we end up giving the person we can't forgive a tremendous amount of our energy because we are always thinking about what they did- and that keeps us from moving powerfully and authentically. Can you imagine what



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would have happened if Jesus had not forgiven Peter for betraying him? He could never have stood with him at that charcoal fire and helped him heal himself. It is my fervent prayer for everyone in this room that Jesus Christ will meet each of you at your own charcoal fires and will help you release these hurts so you can stop giving the people that hurt you in the past, sometimes the very far distant past, so much energy and start giving that energy to God so he can brighten your light and use you and us to transform the world.

This is not easy work. We are not members of a church that offers ten easy doctrinal answers, or tells us that all we need to do is come to church and hear a sermon or be entertained by God with big video screens in a crowd of several thousand so we are not seen too clearly or called into accountability too much.

Instead, here at Disciples San Lorenzo we are called to be in community, to open our hearts, and bring our minds to worship with us. Most of all we are called to spread the good news of Jesus' love for us. That much is clear from our scripture reading this morning. We are called to love one another, just as Jesus loved us, with all of the earth shattering, life changing, ramifications of that. We are called to pray and forgive and to live authentically, following Jesus' example as closely as we can. It is not easy. And sometimes we just have to keep praying and forgiving and shaking our love lights and rooting for each other till God helps us make the connections and the love comes on and flows through us so we can each follow our call and be the loving life giving lights that Jesus Christ calls us to be.