

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time | For Sunday, September 6, 2020

Roads Less Traveled

Written by Rev. Mark Suslenko

Ezekiel 33:7-9

Romans 13:8-10

Matthew 18:15-20



Humility and the desire to learn and grow are important virtues and qualities to possess. Having a true sense of my brokenness and incompleteness is essential for developing and maintaining healthy, challenging, and stimulating relationships. Jesus is all about relationships. After all, justice in the biblical sense is about restoring relationships to their proper order. It's a priority to do all in our power to restore balance and bring reconciliation to places of discord. These are all worthy ideals to pursue. They also sound great on paper but are extremely difficult to achieve.

Conflict is unavoidable. Weakness and sin will inevitably find their way into our relationships and we will wrong and hurt others, especially those we love. Some folks are such pleasers that they will do anything in their power to avoid conflict, even setting their integrity aside in order to keep the waters calm. Others get defensive when faced with confrontation and immediately set the stage for battle. We all deal with conflict in different ways. Sadly, we often allow our feelings to get bruised and hurt. The hurt, because it's allowed to fester, turns to anger. We find that the only recourse we have is to "pick up our ball" and go home. In doing so, another relationship gets severed and another opportunity for reconciliation is missed. Have there been relationships in your life that have been severed and destroyed because of things that were said or done that caused deep hurt and resentment?

Human beings can do a number on each other. Words and actions have the power to hurt deeply. Many people part ways because of the inability or reluctance to reconcile. We all carry a little child within that prefers to punish those who hurt us. We want them to feel the same pain as we do and suffer the same isolating fate. When we have been hurt, we want to hurt back. The Gospel, however, doesn't tolerate this approach. In fact, it's unacceptable. When find ourselves at odds with another, there are some extremely important questions we must ask and answer. What does this conflict say about me? Why am I feeling the way that I do?

Being human can be a road to self-discovery and the pursuit of truth. This is a journey that is best traveled with others, not in isolation. Those with whom we associate can be vessels that assist with our enlightenment and understanding of ourselves, God, others, and the world in which we live. Our friends and associates see other

sides of ourselves. Sometimes, they see parts of us we would rather keep hidden. We are more vulnerable than we think. Good, healthy relationships are meant to be challenging and engaging. Conflict can be an opportunity for honest self-assessment and a lesson in humility. No one is perfect and we all have a lot to learn.

It is unfortunate that many do not develop and learn the tools necessary for good conflict resolution. We are often discouraged from sharing how we really feel, especially when those feelings are negative or critical in nature. We do not know how to process someone's anger or really listen to and hear what others are saying. We are on the one hand tremendously gifted, talented, and blessed and on the other flawed, broken, and sinful. We often live as if we were only the first part and downplay the flawed, broken, and sinful side! We do not know how to handle difficult conversations or to receive the painful and disturbing feelings of another person into the space of our lives. We react rather than receive.

Do you understand that you are a human being who can make poor choices and hurt another human being? Our egos can quickly get in the way and our self-focused needs can muck up even the best of seasoned friendships. Believe it or not, with patience, humility, perseverance, and a desire to grow we can work our way through conflicts and reconcile differences. Jesus preferred the one-on-one approach to reconciliation. But he also realized that humans, being who they are, and not always willing or able to see the truth. The intervention of others may be necessary.

Then, there are those relationships that are truly beyond reconciliation. They are most often abusive relationships, physically, emotionally or spiritually. Dealing with this type of conflict, because of the dynamics involved, is best achieved by walking away. Even doing this can come at a great price as those who want

to control us are reluctant for this to happen. Unfortunately, not everyone has the psychological or spiritual capacity for wholeness. For many, their brokenness is such that being in any type of relationship will only bring greater heartache, shame or pain. There are some relationships that simply cannot exist.

We need to stop being ashamed of our feelings and work at creating spaces in our lives that are open, free, and safe. Having this mutual respect lays the groundwork for healthy and honest dialogue that allows me to be vulnerable to my weakness and sin without fear of retribution or greater division. It does no service to anyone to use the labels of "bad" or "sinful" in describing a person. These imply punishment as the only remedy and leave no room for conversion or reconciliation. All of us want, in one way or another, to find our way home.

Every person and every relationship deserves a chance at reconciliation. When olive branches are extended, humility embraced, honesty upheld, love enkindled, and mutual respect exchanged some powerful "God moments" can be had. Years of painful separation and discord can be healed and divisions cast aside. We have to learn to be okay with honesty and not be afraid to hear and process what someone needs to say, even if it is difficult for us to hear. We need to do all in our power not to harden our hearts, especially to the Divine Voice of the Eternal One. Everyone is invited into the kingdom of reconciliation and no one is cast aside. Everyone is given an opportunity to set straight what once was wrong. This is how God works. We need to do the same.

Rev. Mark Suslenko

PRAYER

Dear Jesus,
Help us to spread Your fragrance
everywhere we go.
Flood our souls with Your spirit and life.
Penetrate and possess our whole being so utterly
that our lives may only be a radiance of Yours.
Shine through us, and be so in us that every soul
we come in contact with may feel
Your presence in our soul.
Let them look up and see no longer us,
but only Jesus.
Stay with us and then we shall begin
to shine as You shine,
so to shine as to be a light to others.
The light, O Jesus, will be all from You;
none of it will be ours.
It will be You, shining on others through us.
Let us thus praise You in the way You love best —
by shining on those around us.
Let us preach You without preaching;
not by words but by our example;
by the catching force, the sympathetic influence
of what we do, the evident fullness of the love
our hearts bear to You.
Amen.

*(A prayer taught by Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta
to her sisters.)*