

Separation and Return: How Grace is Found in Sharing our Story with One Another and Connecting it to Scripture

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Recap from Last Week (today's class and future will be recorded) Outlines also posted online

Narrative story telling as a means of reengaging with one another and connecting our experience with the narratives of scripture.

We've been through a community experience of separation and return both through the scaffolding event and the global pandemic. While we are still in a process of return, we have likely experienced this in different ways.

Re-membering and remembrance are central acts of faith practice. Much of scripture is the written account of the people of a particular time remembering who they are in the context of God's action.

The Eucharist is an important act of remembering who we are after the events of each week. That moment when time collapses and we transcend our experience is a moment of anamnesis. It's the opposite of amnesia. It is the undoing of forgetting.

Why is that important?

- That interplay between transcendence and the immediacy of our daily life is the essence of cruciform living. We cannot endure the pain of this world if there is not redemption also available to us.
- Connects our Story to the longer story of the people of God

It's important to differentiate between how we think of history vs remembrance

Memories are shown to be unreliable from a factual standpoint.

Enter our own remembrance and those of other with a posture of humility

- Need to listen for the story underneath the story rather than correcting errors
- Ask what the goal of our common story is? Is it to ultimately build a sense of connection and resilience rather than a factual accounting?

Violence to our souls can take many forms, and so one question we will continue to grapple with is how God comes to us in those moments.

God hopefully helps us interrupt the cycle of trauma. The hardest thing for people who have experience trauma is interrupting the pattern. Part of telling your story is being able to tell it in a way that imagines a space beyond that story.

Our tradition understands the grace of God as something that comes to us from outside. It is the story of love interrupting violence to that there is a new way forward.

The resurrection is like a portrait of this grace, because it's so clear in the resurrection that the love of God comes into the midst of violence and is not undone by it, but creates another story.

Two theological claims are held in tension as we do this work with one another.

- We live in a world profoundly broken by violence and marred by the harm we inflict on one another
- God loves this world and desires that suffering be met by hope, love, and grace

The challenge is how to discern how this divine desire to love and heal can be spoken and lived out, concretely in the life of faith at work in the world.

State of Rupture and Disorder. Faith helps us to regain agency and order through beauty and faith.

Healing imagination through reflection and encounter with scripture.

“A Christianly formed imagination tells stories about people who are agents in their own lives, with God-given grace to act, moving through embodied history in time, connected to their past and the stories of others who came before them and looks forward in hope to a flourishing future.”

“If grace has the power to reshape the imagination, then theology is the language that both describes that power and evokes it in the lives of people by telling grace filled stories of new imaginings.”

The Road to Emmaus

- How events of trauma affect both individuals and communities and make meaning of their worlds after such events
- Threatened with annihilation, not just physical, your sense of self, your way of life, what you thought you could count on
- Feeling of helplessness
- Numbing out
- Information comes in too quickly to be processed

- The church is called in the space of trauma to engaged in the crucial task of reordering the collective imagination of its people and be wise and passionate in this
- Is this satisfying? Wouldn't we rather “do” something

- Burial liturgy as an example of this
- People of faith as poets of the imagination

- People have to be able to tell their stories
- There needs to be a witness to this testimony that not only creates a safe space for speaking, but also receives the words
- The Testifier and the witness (We are both) must bring the process of telling a new, different story together
 - This restores our sense of agency and hope for the future
- What is the faith story of the scaffolding?
- The pandemic to date?
- A telling from a faith perspective needs to be different than other narrative that might be out there (Political, personal, family)
 - Value of each person (Baptism)
 - Presence and experience of separation (sin)
 - Things done and left undone
 - Grace
 - We are beloved
 - We are recipients and givers of forgiveness
 - We are free to act, even though we know our actions won't be perfect
 - Repairers of the breach
 - Can experience and live in the midst of paradox

Luke 24:13-43

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?' He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.' Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then

their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!' Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, 'Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.' And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?' They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.

- What did you hear or notice in this story?
- How might you imagine Jesus having been in your midst over the past 2 years?

Emmaus

- Two disciples walking along a well carved road
- Speaking frantically? Are they confused?
- They are probably going over the crucifixion over and over again to try and make sense of it
- Did they see the same things?
- Did they remember the same things
- The out of nowhere, Jesus walks up and joins them
- They are too disordered to recognize him
- He accompanies them, listening
- Jesus come to them
- They don't have to figure out how to get to him
- When he does speak, he intervenes and says they are "Foolish"
- He reconstructs their account of his death and continued life by first interpreting for them "Moses and the Prophets"
- He rendered them by pulling it into the bigger story of the people of God
- Still don't recognize him
- They are interested enough though that they don't let him "go on ahead"
- Gather for a meal, he takes blesses and breaks the bread and gives it to them
- Memory is sparked- a lost truth recalled-suddenly their eyes are opened and they recognize him
- Grace breaks in during the simple meal, their imaginations are reframed around a shared table, and healing and fellowship becomes an option
- He then vanishes the very instant they see him, and they again fall into disbelief
- They can't get their overnight, the truth remains eluding
- Recognition comes in waves

- Belief and horror stand together
- After Trauma (Lawrence Langer) we never return to our previous state of innocence
- Grace is “haunted” by the ghost of the violence it addresses
- Peace be with you