

Those who were here on the first Sunday in lent, when we began our season of Kenosis, will remember that early in his ministry, according to the gospel of Luke, Jesus was presented with some options on how to offer leadership. We were comparing the leadership challenges Jesus faced with those of Abraham Lincoln. Each was presented with questionable means to achieve lofty goals.

As the story goes, Jesus was driven into the wilderness where he experienced the “dark night of the soul” searching. In the depths of that wilderness, he met the messenger who crossed his path. That’s the biblical definition of devil...the messenger sent by God to cross our path. Devil comes from the same root word as diabolical. Two latin root words make up this word: dia means “across, or through,” and the word bolene means “to throw.”

So in this spiritual dark night of the soul, Jesus met a messenger, who presented him with viable options to achieve great ends. The first was economic freedom. Turn these stones to bread, said the Messenger, and Jesus considered the incredible power that comes with economic freedom. The next option was popularity. The Messenger promised that all the glory and adoration of all the kingdoms would come to Jesus. And Jesus thought about all the people he might have helped when nothing stood in the way of his authority. And still the greatest option was power. The Messenger threw down the greatest challenge: “throw yourself off this high pinnacle and the angels will protect you.” And Jesus thought of what he could do as he claimed his own mighty power to help people.

All three were good options for leadership. All three were defensible through scripture. All three ways of leading had the potential of a good result. But we learned that while all three might have produced a great result, the end did not justify the means. Achieving the ends through any of those options feeds into the politics of greed and injustice. To quote the apostle Paul in the first letter to the Corinthians, there is a still more excellent way.

Over the past six weeks, a number of people have been gathering on Sunday evenings to explore that still more excellent way; at least according to the apostle Paul. We have been exploring the spiritual practice of Kenosis, wondering how it might apply to the process we will face in the next 12 months of leaving behind this building, permanently.

This practice finds its home in the text we heard from Paul's letter to the church in Philippi. And what we discovered is that the events of Good Friday set up the example for how we are called to live our lives.

We studied this text. We prayed this text. We carried this text on our hearts throughout the six weeks of our time together. What does it mean to let the same mind that was in Christ be in us? What does it mean to live a life of humility? What does it mean to empty ourselves? What does it mean to live a life of obedience?

Paul writes: "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross."

Further yet, what does it mean to have God at work in us? And what does it mean to work out our OWN salvation with fear (let's use the old testament word for fear) awe...with awe and trembling?

We remember this story of torture and death, beatings, and betrayal and we are confronted with these words:

- let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus
- he emptied himself
- he became obedient to the point of death
- work out your own salvation

How does this invitation to emulate the one we follow play out in our lives?

These were troubling ideas for the group that gathered on Sunday evenings. I'm hunching these questions are just as troubling for us. These questions call us beyond an event that happened there and then, and challenge us to live the spiritual practice of Kenosis every moment.

And soon into our Sunday evening events, we encountered St. John of the Cross, a 16<sup>th</sup> century Carmelite friar and priest who wrote extensively, out of profound hardship, on what it means to be empty. After John joined the Carmelite order, Saint Teresa of Avila asked him to help her reform movement. John supported her belief that the order should return to its life of prayer. But many Carmelites felt threatened by this reform, and some members of John's own order kidnapped him.

He was locked in a cell six feet by ten feet and beaten three times a week by the monks. There was only one tiny window high up near the ceiling. Yet in that unbearable dark, cold, and desolation, his love and faith were like fire and light. He had nothing left but God -- and God brought John his greatest joys in that tiny cell.

After nine months, John escaped by unscrewing the lock on his door and creeping past the guard. Taking only the mystical poetry he had written in his cell, he climbed out a window using a rope made of strips of blankets. With no idea where he was, he followed a dog to civilization. He hid from pursuers in a convent infirmary where he read his poetry to the nuns. From then on his life was devoted to sharing and explaining his experience of God's love.

It's interesting that both John of the Cross and the apostle Paul did some of their best thinking while imprisoned. Both had the debasing experience of incarceration and assault while clinging to the values of their faith in a loving God. For John of the Cross, the nature of God is love – an unconditional outpouring of grace and compassion. It is selfless and unlimited. The only way this love is expressed in the world is through the relationships humans have with each other. But Paul and John of the Cross agree, for humans to live this love requires the great shedding of the diversion of self seeking. And in the shedding, with great humility, the nature of God lives in us and through us unimpeded.

For John of the Cross, God, the great love outpouring, is deeply incarnational. It dwells within. Not some distant God who has needs and expectations, but an indwelling God...From then and there, to here and now.

I'm left with nothing but questions this morning as we live into the darkness of this day. What does it cost for me to move God from a then and there experience 2000 years ago, to a deep indwelling that makes my own Good Friday's open for real transformation? I choose it. I can keep God there, and continue to build layers upon layers trying to please that God and my own ego. Or, I can move God here, and peel away those layers, to reveal the holy, indwelling of a God of life, who is at work within me. Like Jesus who chose the way of the cross, the choice is mine. Working out my own salvation for God's good pleasure, is a choice I get to make, everyday of my life. I hope I make the choice that leads to life. Amen.