



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

THE REVEREND EARL GROUT, DEACON

MAUNDY THURSDAY, APRIL 18, 2019

EXODUS 12:1-14; PSALM 116; 1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-26; JOHN 13:1-17, 31-35

SCREW IN YOUR LIGHT BULB

Archbishop Desmond Tutu told a friend, “We are only the light bulbs, Richard, and our job is just to remain screwed in!” In his version, Jesus said, “While you have the light, believe in the brightest in his new commandment, which we commemorate this night— “that you love one another” (John 13.34). But unless our bulbs are screwed in, darkness will overtake us (John 12.35).

Our problem is that we have heard these words so often that even the most scandalous Gospel passages just skim over our heads. “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me” (Matt. 10.37). Who wants to hear that? “But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first” (Matt. 19.30). Whatever. Our bulbs rattle in their sockets. We no longer hear Jesus calling us to make his journey our own.

The business of Lent is to screw our bulbs back in, so that we can hear Jesus and follow him. The business of Lent is repentance, which means embracing a complete change of mind and heart. Not beating ourselves up or forgoing donuts for five weeks but changing our lives as radically as the Gospels are radical. What does this mean? How do we go about it?

One approach lies in seeing life as two halves. It’s a popular idea pioneered by psychologist Carl Jung. In his book, Falling Upwards, Franciscan author Richard Rohr offers a Christian interpretation of it. It goes roughly like this.

In the first half we build a home for ourselves using the materials of our upbringing, family, religion and career. The first half is big on guidelines and boundaries, rules and rituals, values and beliefs. Out of these materials our

ego constructs and defends an identity. Control, wealth and security—in a word, success—are its desired outcomes.

Many people remain fixed in the first half. Others are drawn or even thrust into the second half where a restless desire to live more deeply draws them away from the security and comfort of their first half. Often it is pain of some kind that impels them to search deeper for meaning and purpose. The second half is where we seek God and allow God to find us. It is a journey away from home.

Homes are meant to be left, not lived in. All heroes leave home, or they wouldn't be heroes. The Bible's stories invariably involve leaving home on a journey. Abraham leaves Ur. Moses leaves Midian for Egypt. Israel leaves Egypt. Jesus leaves Nazareth. We must leave our first home to meet Jesus in our life's second half.

The two halves of life are metaphorical, of course. Very often, they are lived at the same time, and neither is related to age. A young nurse, a member of Saint Mark's, left home last year to serve on a hospital ship in Africa. My second half journey started in mid-career when I was drawn into AIDS ministry by a sermon. Don't get your hopes up.

So we screw our bulbs in tight, and leave home to follow Jesus. Two things are needed for this journey: faith and trust. Richard Rohr observes that Jesus praised trust and faith more than love. "The only consistent pattern I can find," observes Rohr, "is that all the books of the Bible seem to agree that somehow God is with us and we are not alone." Faith and trust are what keep the soul open for something more. They are what nudge us out the door in the first place, revive us as we fall again and again in our walk with Jesus, and sustain us when we decide to keep trying anyway.

What can we expect on the Gospel path? First, the Gospels are counter-intuitive. They are the mirror opposites of first-half living. Sometimes puzzling. For example:

- "Let the little children come to me," Jesus tells his disciples, "and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it" (Luke 18.16—17). How do we do that?

Sometimes they upset social norms by reversing roles.

- In Mark, Jesus instructs his disciples: "You know that among the Gentiles,

those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.” (10.42—44).

In Matthew, Jesus says, “All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted” (23.12). Servant, slave, humble? That’s subversive!

Second, the Gospels show that repentance demands some brutal self-assessment. Commenting on the Sermon on the Plain in Luke, Jesuit Walter Burghardt exhorts us to “turn the woes around.” For example:

- “Blessed, fortunate, happy are you who are full now, who are sleek and well-fed, because you are strong enough to feed the hungry, to touch empty stomachs with compassion. But blessed only if you have the mind of Christ. Only if you do not take your food for granted. Only if you are uncomfortable as long as one sister or brother cries in vain for bread or justice or love. Only if you experience your own emptiness—how desperately you need the hungry, how far you still

are from God. Blessed are the full, if you are always hungry.” Chew on that for bit.

The Gospels humble us. “Know and understand that the Father is in me,” says Jesus, “and I am in the Father” (John 10.38). So... when he says to love your enemies and do good to those who hate you (Luke 6.27), isn’t he really saying that God does these things, so why don’t you? When he says, “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy” (Matt. 5.7), isn’t he really saying that God is merciful, so why aren’t you?

More than anything, following Jesus means offering ourselves. “The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10.11). This may involve dying for others, but as author Henri Nouwen says, “it means first of all making our own lives—our sorrows and joys, our despair and hope, our loneliness and experience of intimacy—available to others as sources of new life.” As we set out every day, it means respect and compassion to everyone we meet and to all creatures great and small. Maybe that’s all we do today, but if we can do that, who knows what God might do through us? It is not for us to decide.

Finally, live without fear. One of the Bible’s primary messages is “Do not be afraid.” It

appears 365 times in the Scriptures.
Apparently God means it. *Noli timere.*

As Jesus rises, he will raise you, too. So, take the risk. Screw in your light bulb. Leave home. And shine brightly. Amen.

John 13:1-17, 31-35 *[Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."]*

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord--and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

"Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."]



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