

Pastor Roy's Sermon from August 26, 2012

Prayer is largely just being silent: holding the tension instead of even talking it through, offering the moment instead of fixing it by words and ideas, loving reality as it is instead of understanding it fully. We must not push the river, we must just trust that we are really in the river, and God is the current. -- Richard Rohr,

Readings: Joshua 1:1,2,14-18, Psalm 34:15-22, Ephesians 6, John 6:56-69

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Joshua invites the Israelites, fresh in the promised land, "Choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living. . .but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

But who is Yahweh? Who is the Lord whom Joshua calls Israel to serve? As we read the Hebrew Bible, it is obvious that sometimes Israel had no idea who Yahweh was and how they were to serve this God. The prophets preached and invited the Israelites and later, the Jews, to practice mercy, justice, and freedom. Neither can we "choose this day" unless we know who we are choosing and what we are rejecting. Whose version of God is true?

The apostle writing Ephesians tells us to take up the armor of God, to pray in the Spirit at all times, to be alert as we live our lives in faith. Yet, how can we pray and take up the armor of God if we do not know what that is? Oh, it seems obvious, but what seems obvious to us might be more habits of acting and thinking than the life of the Spirit to which God is calling us. If we live in our comfort zone, we most likely not following the Spirit's call since the Spirit challenges us and leads us into a renewed future.

Do we take the time to be still so that we can turn off the automatic stuff that plays in our heads non-stop, so that we might listen to the call of the Spirit? If we take the time, we can relearn what the armor of the Spirit is and how to take it up. We can be centered in the call of God and choose this day whom we will serve. This listening and waiting process never ends. When we succeed for a day or maybe even a week, that's great, but the next day/week, we start all over again. There is no "arriving" in this effort to know God and live the life of the Spirit. We are on a pilgrimage.

Today, will I still the raging voices within me so that I might center myself in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ? Will I remember the cross, not as a piece art or jewelry, but as a sign of what life is all about—setting my own desires and impulses aside so that I might listen to and walk with God and the people around me? We are never finished listening to God or one another. We will never arrive. This should not overwhelm us but it is a reminder that we are pilgrims on a journey.

Think about our sisters and brothers, the plants and animals. If any of these ceases the struggle to stay alive, it will die. The same is true with the life of the spirit. When we stop waiting and listening to the Spirit, we return to our natural impulses and to whatever our personalities tend to be drawn. We then substitute our own ways for the ways of God. We commit the sin of Adam and Eve who chose to do it their way, of Israel worshipping the golden calf while Moses was on Mount Sinai, of Israel refusing to go into the promised land for fear of the natives, of David desiring his friend's wife, committing adultery and murder to cover it up, of Jezebel chasing Elijah because he is a threat to her lifestyle, of

Herod's wife who found John the Baptist to be a nuisance. We must focus our energies on listening to God's mercy and peace. From the inside of our logically emotional minds, there is little difference between fear, greed, and bitterness on one side, and mercy, compassion, and peace on the other. From the inside they feel the same. There is no other way to know the truth but to wait and listen for God. Even then, of course, we will err. This is why we have confession and absolution at the beginning of most services. This introduction to worship reminds us that we are a confessing people. We are called to have an attitude of confession, to have an attitude of forgiveness, to seek God's mercy as we bestow it.

Being healthy spiritually takes a lot of energy and often our energy will lapse, our sight be diminished, our ears will be closed. Then we must begin anew and every time, the Spirit meets us, embraces us, welcomes us back on the journey. That is the point of this sermon.

I am concerned with all the voices which surround us these days. Some are the voice of God's Spirit, some are the voice of chaos, chance, greed, and instinct gone stark, raving mad. As technologies increase, we are surrounding ourselves with constant sound, unending voices, and addictive behaviors. Every new technology has a shadow. We are by nature a captive people. We need this and that, we fall in love with this and that, we desire this and that. We easily forget that all that we need is within. The Spirit is waiting within us. Waiting for us to slow down enough, to be still enough—to listen.

God can speak in the silence. The loose ends of our lives are connected, the broken relationships can be healed, the peace of the Gospel of merciful love can take hold in the silence where God is present. True prayer does not create God, but allows God to recreate us. It is a foundation for living our lives, for making choices which do, indeed, matter.

Jesus said, "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. But the one who eats this bread will live forever."

"Eat my flesh, drink my blood" is strong language for profound sharing. Giving and taking. Listening and speaking. Waiting then acting. Holding and releasing. This is the language of intimate communion. Communion which happens when we gather, here; but also when we are alone in silence.

We need to sit with Jesus. We need to be still. How else can we put the brakes on our impulsive thoughts and actions?

This is not instant, easy spirituality. Here is an invitation to continue our journey in faith. This is not about believing safe things and avoiding questions which make us feel vulnerable. Being still—being present—is about embracing God moving all around us and within us. Jesus never played it safe. He took chances and he called people to accountability before the God who calls us into freedom and mercy. He rested in his absolute safety in God, no matter what. Jesus calls us to do the same, with the same foundation of trust. Let us all, in the way that we are gifted, make room for the Spirit to lead us, teach us, and guide us. God is good. We are blessed. Amen.