

Easter Sunday 2024 “God loves you more than your love yourself”

Bishop Frank Schuster

The Lord has risen! Alleluia! Easter brings back such wonderful memories and most of them revolve around family. Celebrations like Easter have a way of bringing family together. I have a memory from my childhood that I think most human beings alive share in some fashion. It is a memory of being asked to play the piano for my grandparents when I was like six years old. You see, when we visited grandma and grandpa around this time of year, it wasn't a time for Netflix, tablets or smart phones (we didn't have them). We would listen to each other's stories over popcorn and lemon aid and eventually the kids would take turns playing something for the grandparents on the piano. And I remember being nervous about this because the best I could do when I was six was “chop sticks”...and not very good at all. I remember doing the best I could though and I will always remember the look on my grandparents' faces after I was finished. I might as well have played for them Rachmaninoff, they were so pleased and over the top with their love and praise. How many of you have a similar memory like that? I think most of us have a memory from our childhood of being praised from someone we loved when we didn't really feel like we deserved it, from a parent, uncle or sibling perhaps. However, I think it is simply in the nature of a grandparent at times to love their grandchildren with a love that is irrational, over the top.

I share the story of my grandparents celebrating me after playing for them chopsticks because, if this kind of irrational love is true of grandparents for their grandkids, consider how true this kind of love is of God for us? You see, the events of Holy Week have led us to Easter Sunday and the revelation is: God loves us more than we love ourselves. Let that sink in for a moment: God loves you more than you love yourself. We humans forget how much God loves us, to our peril at times, which is why we need to celebrate Holy Week and Easter every year...to help us remember.

There is a wonderful Greek word that is used to define memory that I touched on last year which I want to delve in deeper with you this year. This Greek word is anamnesis. Remember that? That is a great word isn't it? Anamnesis. Let's say it together. Anamnesis. The word literally means “remembrance”. In the imperative, it would mean “do not forget”. Where do we see this word in scripture? Take first Corinthians for example, “On the night [Jesus] was handed over, he took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’” (1 Corinthians 11) The word “remembrance” in the original Greek here is anamnesis. Jesus is telling us: do not forget. But more to the point I am trying to get at, think about how much love must have been in Jesus' heart to offer himself for us as food and drink and to be our sacrificial lamb for the atonement of our sins? It feels like a love that we don't deserve and yet God shares this love with us. And today we celebrate a historical truth without which Christianity wouldn't have even started let alone spread like it did, the tomb was empty. God's love for us cannot die. Jesus rose from the dead and he loves us more than we love ourselves. The liturgies this past week have been a celebration of anamnesis because we humans have a way of foolishly forgetting.

And so enter our Gospel reading: “On the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them.” Peter and the Beloved Disciple found the tomb empty. A couple days earlier, the disciples deserted Jesus. On Easter Sunday they were risking their necks in the town square announcing to the world that Jesus had risen. Some dismissed them as fools. Others, however, believed them. Some of them even saw with their own eyes. And the world has never been the same since.

Can anyone here tell me what the opposite of anamnesis is? If anamnesis can literally mean “remembrance”, the word amnesia literally means “to forget”. Both words share the same Greek root. The spiritual challenge that is given to us this Easter is to not develop amnesia when it comes to this very specific spiritual truth: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believe in him might not perish but might have eternal life.” What this means is: God loves you with an irrational love and God loves you more than you love yourself. Don’t forget that.

So much about Easter reminds us of our childhoods. We are all here today because of family members who sacrificed so much for us, loved us with an irrational love, and shared with us their faith in Jesus. It is also true to say that some of us might also be here today with hurts and wounds. The good news is, no matter what memories we carry with us through life, no matter how many hurts that haunt us, the scars we carry, or the spiritual sores that have trouble healing, we remember today that the tomb was empty. Jesus rose from the dead like he said he would and promises to raise us from the dead as well. Today we celebrate that the power of death does not have the final say in our world because God loves us more than we love ourselves. As Christians, we are called to remember this on Easter and to share this kind of irrational and generous love with others through Christ our Lord. Amen.