

John 14:15-21 (NRSV)

'If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

'I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.'

Reader: This is the Gospel of Christ.

All: Praise be to Jesus Christ

Reflection

Resurrection

I have lots of confidence that all of us here are very familiar with Jesus saying “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” And I’m also confident, that you have heard enough reflections to know we are not talking about the warm feelings of love, as much as what we do, how we take action. We, in the church, are less familiar with the last sentence of this Gospel reading. The one where it is all turned around, or flipped over. *“They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me”*. Notice there is nothing here in the text about being Jesus disciple, or even being part of the church (though these are post-resurrection instructions for followers of Jesus). For us in our time they are simply part of our three year training in the Christian way of Life program called the 3 year Lectionary.

“Those who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me”, says Jesus.

Those who live their lives in harmony with Jesus commandments are the ones Jesus loves. So for instance, to go to the rather extreme end of this commandment to love, I have an illustration and a story. The Lutheran Biblical Scholar Brian Stoffregen uses the teaching from Jesus on “Love your enemies” as an illustration for this text. Well that’s just about as tough as it gets. Neither Jesus, nor Brian mince words. “Love your enemies” says Brian, is a saying of Jesus that emphasises action. “Showing one’s love” or “demonstrating one’s love” and it really doesn’t matter whether the warm feelings are there. Demonstrating ones love is about doing

“beneficial deeds” for ones enemies, or “doing what helps” regardless of our personal individual emotions.

And here’s the story; a true one. I have from a letter sent to me in the early 1980’s by Desmond Tutu shortly after he was made Bishop of Lesotho in South Africa. In this letter Desmond Tutu told about the wily king of Lesoto, Moshoeshoe II, whose residence was a fortress at the top of a mountain. Fortifications for the King’s residence included piles of boulders that could be let loose to roll down the hill to deal with his enemies. And once his enemies had fled for their lives? King Moshoeshoe would then quickly, unexpectedly, send them cartloads of food.

Now let’s bring this commandment to love in the light of the work of Reconciliation that our church (and Canadian Society) are working on. It’s taken me a while, (and I am no expert) to come to see, that in our grand-parents generation (perhaps great-grandparents generation) the indigenous peoples on whose land the settlers arrived, were, at the least, treated as “Other” (and at the worst “the Enemy”). And yes, there were, like today, cross cultural friendships, occasional partnerships and, naturally enough, some marriages. But, as a whole approach, as we sadly know, there was great effort made to “kill the Indian” by wiping out language, cultural celebrations, spiritual practices, and thus make them all “white”. In the historical archives, there is sufficient evidence to conclude that, among the settlers, this whole set of actions was seen as “for their own good”, and....you know...the “the best thing to do”. Ah this is hard work!

Now, in the light of Reconciliation, and as followers of Christ Jesus, we are now asking afresh, in the light of Jesus commandment, how are we to love? Naturally the answers are many and varied, and need to be bold, thoughtful, and creative. I am going to bring your attention this morning to just one approach. It is to cultivate a greater awareness of our similarities. And since we are a faith community, one place to explore would have something to do with indigenous spirituality.

My first husband, George Ladd was a historian, scholar and priest who worked a number of years on the Peguis Indian reserve, north of Winnipeg. He later wrote a book “Shall we Gather at the River” on the story of Indian-White relationships on the banks of the Red River around 1870. In this, he introduced me, and his readers, to three major characters (or spirit powers) in

Native cosmology. (Now here I'm talking about the Woods Cree of Manitoba and western Ontario). There is "Windigo" who was the spectre of mass starvation, "Paakuk" who is present in disease and death (given the smallpox epidemics, "Paakuk" was prevalent), and then there is Wisekedjak, (also known as Nanabozho) . Now Wisekedjak is known as the Shape Shifting spirit power of resilience and adaptability. Universally, among the indigenous peoples of North America, Wisekedjak is known as The Trickster. It is to Wisekedjak the Trickster we turn our attention.

Just a few weeks ago I came across Rachel Taber-Hamilton, an Episcopal priest from the Diocese of Olympia. Rachel (whose cultural heritage includes the First Nations Shackan Indian Band (of the Nicola Tribe here in BC) as well as Pennsylvania Dutch (really German) and Scots-Irish) who wrote an Easter message called "A fools Journey to Easter". Rachel points to the Indigenous "Trickster" as the most powerful archetype of human belief. Trickster's ability to transform itself leads to its greater ability to transform reality, becoming thereby a catalyst for social change. Here is what Pastor Rachel writes:

"Tricksters are reviled by those in power and, in the stories, are frequently vilified by those threatened by their message and their rebellious disregard for social conventions. Tricksters have a tendency to laugh with joy when what is carefully boxed up by the powerful few is freed for the entire world to gain. By those without social power, the Trickster is perceived as playful. By those who cannot comprehend its purpose, the Trickster is perceived as foolish. By those who have the most to lose if the Trickster is successful in its quest, the Trickster is perceived as cunning and incredibly dangerous. " "And if the Trickster dies, it does not stay dead, but rather transforms into a different shape, just as Jesus did at his resurrection. "The Trickster is all about liberation ... [it is] a force that destroys old ways of being while empowering the rise of new ways of being." These traditions of the Trickster teach every generation about the necessity of transformation.

Now further applying this to Jesus, and looking, through the lens of the Trickster, the stories of Holy Week – reveals the ultimate power hidden behind the mask of Jesus (the Divine in human form). As a Trickster, Jesus is a challenge to social order and form, a danger to many, a

destroyer of old ways and old powers, and a life giving force that has been set loose by the Creator to transform the world, free the People and cultivate new life.

By choosing to follow Christ, we are following a Divine Fool, differentiating ourselves from those who seek social power and material wealth “at the heedless expense of Creation”: Ultimately, says Taber-Hamilton, when we confront the empty tomb at Easter, it is because Trickster has shape-shifted ... into us! My George was speculating the same thing; Jesus , in his resurrection, is like a Trickster figure.

Well, I don't know about you, but this is rather startling and intriguing thinking. Last week I encouraged you to think, that, when it comes to an approach to our life in faith, to keep our hearts open and make an effort to hold a mindset of “One-ning” or “non-dualism”, and that we can have confidence in the importance of this because when other great World Religions – Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism for examples – all find this important. We can have confidence in this “Wisdom Way of Knowing” , not because these world religions are the “same” (we are not), but through long seeking deep faith in human life we we have come to similar conclusions; that One-ness/non-duality is of the highest importance to human life.

So here we now have another example of a similarity: For the indigenous spiritual traditions, spirit power of the Trickster is most highly cherished. For us in our Christian tradition, the resurrection of Christ Jesus is deeply cherished. For the indigenous peoples, invoking the power of the Trickster (telling Wisedjak stories), and for Christians in our annual 50 day festival of Resurrection (and telling Resurrection of Christ Jesus stories), we are invoking the power of resilience and adaptability. Thinking again about the command to love – which we have long understood as “charity”(in which the “haves” give to the “have nots”). This is “love” practiced as SOLIDARITY. This kind of “Love as Solidarity” opens the way to an increase in respect and creative collaboration – as you do with your Friday meals.

Years ago when I wore my Cowichan vest to an indigenous-settler gathering. I was just wearing it all the time, and hadn't thought about what I was wearing and thus suddenly had some hesitancy. Was I going to offend by wearing it? I didn't know. But one indigenous woman came up to me, smiled, reached over and felt the wool of my vest, and said “Cowichan?” I said “yes,

Cowichan". She talked with appreciation of seeing one of the old and real Cowichans being worn.

Wisekedjak, The Trickster, is known as the great Shape Shifter. Those who invoke the shape shifting transformative powers of the Trickster develop great adaptability. We who love and follow Jesus are invited, according to our own faith tradition, to shape shift our way forward in our life in Christ. Our faith teaches us that, in our love of Jesus, we are to become the very hands, feet and heart of Jesus in serving our world. We are offered the Body of Christ so that we can continue to become the Body of Christ in the world. Jesus who was dead, lives again!