



Provincial Synod Opening Eucharist and Installation of Archbishop Melissa M. Skelton Holy Cross Day: September 14, 2018

John 3:13-17

Jesus said, “No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

“Selfless love is always costly; fear can't afford it, pride doesn't understand it (but) friends never forget it.”

Remember? Remember the story of Nicodemus, that well-intentioned Pharisee, that respected Jewish insider, who came to Jesus at night trying to understand who Jesus really was? Remember what Jesus said to him—that you have to be willing to be born again if you want to follow God? Remember Nicodemus’ confusion at this idea of being born again because he was, of course, a grown man living a settled religious and personal life, a person who had come to his views on religion, on moral life and on life itself in a careful, well-informed way? Remember him?

This is who Jesus is speaking to in the words of our Gospel tonight. Jesus is responding to Nicodemus’ confusion at what it means to be born again as in this passage Jesus explains who God really is and how God really operates. “God so loved the world,” Jesus says to Nicodemus, “that God gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” That’s who God is. That’s how God operates.

Selfless love is always costly; fear can't afford it, pride doesn't understand it (but) friends never forget it.”

It's fascinating to me that here we are at the opening Eucharist for our Provincial Synod on Holy Cross Day as the sun is setting. Here we are, delegates to this Synod, all of us religious insiders of one kind or another, in some ways, then, like Nicodemus. Here we are coming together to meet Jesus in our worship and our prayer, in our time getting to know each other, in our sharing meals, in our getting some things done and in the important conversations we will be having. Here we are ready to encounter Jesus as we do all these things—and what Jesus's words are reminding us about is this: the foundation on which we stand is God's costly, fearless, humble love. This and no other is the love that claims us. This and no other is the kind of love we are asked to offer to one another.

“Selfless love is always costly; fear can't afford it, pride doesn't understand it (but) friends never forget it.”

These words that I keep repeating about selfless love, are the words of a man by the name of Bob Goff. Bob calls himself a “recovering lawyer” in that after practicing law for 28 years he left that career to pursue a life that enacted God's costly, fearless, humble love in a new way. More specifically he decided to stop trying to figure out the fine points of Christian faith, to stop trying to settle all the questions he had about his religion, and instead to learn about his Christian faith through doing it. Out of his experience he wrote a book entitled *Love Does*, all the profits of which he gave to help children at risk all around the world. From this he then founded a non-profit human rights organization by the same name operating in Uganda, India, Iraq, Nepal, Afghanistan and Somalia. In the midst of the adventures, Goff then wrote another book entitled *Everyone Always* about God's need for all of us—even those we disagree with or those who irritated us—in the bringing of new life to the world. And so his new message has been about the deeply spiritual value of being with others who are not like ourselves.

Goff is the master of the unforgettable quote, the crazy good one-liner. To give you a sense of this, let me read some of his one-liners to you—some are about the love of God that we are invited to take up and some are about our need for those different from ourselves to take up this love:

...Love is never stationary. In the end, love doesn't just keep thinking about it or keep planning for it. Simply put: love does.

God isn't wowed when we go across an ocean; (God's) dazzled when we go across the street. Keep loving your neighbors - they're everywhere.

God doesn't give us a recipe for living as a community, but (God) gives us great ingredients: (God) gives us everybody, always. If we're going to get it right, it's going to take everybody to pull it off. It won't get done in a day or two either. It's going to take always.

(for me) faith isn't about knowing all of the right stuff or obeying a list of rules. It's something more, something more costly because it's about being present (to each other) and making a sacrifice. I think that's what God had in mind. It's also what (God) has in mind for us when it comes to other people.

And, of course, this:

Selfless love is always costly; fear can't afford it, pride doesn't understand it but friends never forget it.

And so as we begin our Synod, this is what I'm asking all of us to do—be present to each other, especially those who are different from ourselves. Pour out yourselves toward each other in terms of your attention, your willingness to listen and your desire to understand. Do these things in spite of any fear you might have and in spite of any pride that may get in the way. If we're able to do these things, I believe we'll have a Provincial Synod that will be hard to forget—not because the food and company will be fabulous (which they will be), and not because it's exciting to have the Primate with us or to have the new Executive Director of Sorrento Centre here (both of which are also exciting). No, as wonderful as these things are, our Provincial Synod will instead be memorable because in being present to each other in costly, fearless, and humble ways we will experience the friendship that in Christ we have already been given. It will be a friendship made not just through what we do together but through how we do it.