



Sermon, May 9, 2021
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Junction City United Methodist Church

Sermon Series: Parting Thoughts

“Why I Wrote Detox!”

Scripture: Luke 1:46-55

46 And Mary said:

“My soul glorifies the Lord

47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

48 for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,

49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name.

50 His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.

51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.

53 He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.

54 He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful

55 to Abraham and his descendants forever,
just as he promised our ancestors.”

Scripture Reading 2

Matthew 20:20-28

20 Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, and kneeling before him, she asked a favor of him. 21 And he said to her, “What do you want?” She said to him, “Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.” 22 But Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?”^[a] They said to him, “We are able.” 23 He said to them, “You will indeed drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left, this is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.”

24 When the ten heard it, they were angry with the two brothers. 25 But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. 26 It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; 28 just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

This book grew out of that very personal search for a life more deeply planted in the word of Jesus Christ, for a life of devoted discipleship, a life

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where my heart’s home is the dwelling of God. It is a search for a life of deeper truth-telling about myself to myself and to God. It is, at its core, a *search to live out the Path of Jesus in the midst of the challenges and opportunities of the twenty-first century.*

In order to be a twenty-first century man who desired to pattern and shape his life after the example of Jesus, I realized that I needed to return first and foremost to his life and teachings and see if there was something he said that directly addressed what it means to follow him *as a man*. I started to read the Gospels more carefully, paying attention to when it was apparent he was talking to his male disciples, and when he was addressing larger groups of disciples, some of whom were women as well as men. I paid attention to what Jesus said and did in regards to the social conventions of his day, but more particularly to how he dealt with those who had power over others, whether they were in positions of teaching authority, governmental authority, or social hierarchy, such as men over women or husbands over wives.¹

What I discovered was not only a scathing indictment of the relationships between men and women in our homes and our society, but, more significantly, I uncovered what I believe to be a clear demonstration of a specifically male spirituality, based in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. I further discerned that throughout the Gospels, Jesus strove to instill this spirituality within the lives and minds of his male followers. Furthermore, I realized that this spirituality was not simply meant to be a set of lofty teachings, clever aphorisms or points to ponder, but rather, a way of life deeply rooted in the spirit and power of the One who had emptied himself of all divine prerogatives and power and became servant of all. To be a new creation in Christ as Paul talks about in 2 Corinthians 5:17 means to enter into the full way of being and acting that Jesus demonstrated, and which is a full expression of who he is, and thus is a revelation of God’s very self. What this means in terms of living the path of Jesus as a man in the context of our society in the 21st century is very specific, and is not necessarily what it means to live the path of Jesus as a woman in the context of our society in the 21st century.

¹ I use the preposition “over” deliberately. The social relations of his day were hierarchically stratified, and based upon the domination of one group or class by another. That this was the accepted and expected order of things should make the proclamation of Christ’s emptying himself of the power, domination and authority of divinity in Philippians 2:6-8 even more shocking. Just what is this Jesus all about?

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But as the early two decades of the 21st Century wore on, it became obvious that this book was written to cure a sickness.

It is a sickness that has reached epidemic proportions in the United States of America. It is a sickness that festers in the hearts and minds of nearly half of the population, and has resulted in the deaths of thousands of innocent people, the gender-based terrorizing of women and children, the brutalization of persons of color and forceful deportation of persons born on the soil of other nations, among other presenting symptoms.

This epidemic is a virulent form of masculinity that is destroying things – destroying the planet, destroying democracy, destroying families, destroying women, destroying men. Read the headlines – the *#MeToo* movement has pulled away the curtain revealing the lascivious culture of men in power. Politicians, presidents, CEOs, media magnates, entertainers, actors, untold numbers of bosses and managers, coaches, sports doctors – all satisfying their personal sexual lusts, fantasies, and appetites through the power they wield over the women in their sphere of control and influence.

Churches, synagogues, and temples are not exempt. Search the Internet, find the YouTube channels where religious leaders preach the supremacy of men over women, who refuse to allow women in positions of leadership, who proclaim control over women’s bodies in the name of saving the unborn but who then leave women on their own to fend for themselves and raise the children who were once the “precious unborn” but are now problems – women’s problems.

There is a cure for this toxic form of masculinity that is life-giving, that seeks the welfare of others, that respects and cares for the earth and all its creatures. It is the way of thinking, acting, and being that was lived and taught by Jesus of Nazareth 2000 years ago. He taught it to his male disciples, and demonstrated it with his female disciples. Sadly, it has been largely ignored and even countermanded by the legions of male hierocrats who came to power as Christianity was absorbed and co-opted by the Roman Domination System of empire and male power and privilege. This is one of the great ironies of histories, because Jesus specifically *forbade* his (male) followers to “lord it over one another” in the way the rulers of the nations did.

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Take just two examples of the many scripture studies in my book. The first comes from the chapter entitled “Son of Magnificat.” There is an old saying that “the hand that rocks the cradle can topple empires.” Think of what it would be like to have been raised by the woman who thought about God in the way that Mary thinks in the song that Luke ascribes to her, called the Magnificat:

He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.

Think of how Jesus came to know from his mother that God is concerned about the social conditions of all persons, and how it is that human beings relate to one another and treat one another. Did Mary affirm for Jesus the teachings of Moses when he reveals God’s nature and character: “For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing” (Deuteronomy 10:17-18 NIV).

This same God, whose name is holy, knows the true order of things, in contrast to the proud, whose pretensions of status, privilege and power are simply constructions of their imaginations. This shows that, to God, social hierarchies are simply human inventions, but not the reflection of a Divine plan at all. Just because those who wield power over others claim that it is the “order of things,” does not mean that it is God’s order. Those in power always try to remain in power, and will interpret the course of events in order to justify their hold on power. It is a fact of human existence reflected in all the official histories of human empires and is repeated over and over again in the Bible.

But the Magnificat of Mary reveals God’s plan in contrast: to put down the mighty from their thrones, to exalt those of low status, to feed those who are hungry, and those who are wealthy are sent away. Contrast these priorities of God with the priorities of contemporary society (which aren’t really all that much different from the societies of the Roman empire of

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Jesus’ time). Essentially, then, God’s intention is to overturn patterns of social interaction that favor the few at the expense of others.

The second example comes from the other Scripture Lesson for this morning: Not Lording Over Others. This incident is found in all three Synoptic Gospels and is particularly illustrative of Jesus’ heart because he specifically identifies what he understands his life-mission to be: to serve and to give his life as a ransom. To *serve* and to *give*. In a nutshell this describes the spirituality of Jesus. But Jesus describes it himself in direct contrast to the lines of power, privilege, domination and control as found in the world. These are the temptations that Jesus wrestled with, and they are issues that confront men on a daily basis.

Jesus is engaging in a thorough critique and rejection of how power is used in human affairs to control, dominate and oppress other people. It is not just referring to the control one would have if one happened to be in a position of political authority or power. Few, if any, of his disciples would have ever had that opportunity to power, with the possible exception of Matthew, whose authority was merely derivative from being a hireling of the Roman empire. What Jesus does is basically to say this: “You are familiar with how political power is wielded in our world. You have experienced it used against you. You have seen how it oppresses and hurts and destroys. That is the opposite of what I am about. The power you have experienced presses people down. I have come to raise them up. The power you have experienced captures and enslaves people. I have come to ransom and set people free. The power you have experienced has been used by those in power for their own personal benefit. I have come that others may benefit from me.”

Giving and serving are not concepts foreign to men. The participation of many men in the military is evidence of the willingness of men to give their lives to a cause. After all, it is not called “military *service*” for nothing. Volunteer fire departments all across the country and world are staffed by men who willingly leave the comfort and safety of work and home in order to confront the danger and threat out-of-control fires present to their communities. What Jesus does is to focus upon this impulse and raise it to a guiding theme for his followers.

This impacts men in specific ways. Instead of asking, “How will this action get me ahead in the world or raise me up a notch,” we ask ourselves, “How

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does this action serve others and help them get ahead, raise them up a notch, or provide for their welfare?” In the sphere of politics consider how the tone might instantly change from the triumphalist, no-holds-barred, winner-take-all, battle-front atmosphere of national politics to one that is based upon serious consideration of how to serve the lowest economic sectors of society. Or consider how differently business might be done if the bottom line of a company was not amassing profits for shareholders and exorbitant salaries for upper echelon executives, but how profits might be used not only to develop new products that actually served the needs of persons, but also were used to provide needed services to under-privileged communities?

G.K. Chesterton famously said, “It's not that Christianity has been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult, and not tried.” The path of Jesus demands change, and courage to face up to our dysfunctional and destructive society. It requires of us to live our lives for the betterment and well-being of others around us and far away from us.

What will men get out of this book?

Men will learn how to connect their faith and deepest values with their lives and actions; they will discover how the Gospels present an entire way of life that encompasses the way they relate to other men, to the women in their lives, and to their families. They will learn practical ways to become better fathers, partners and men in society by confronting any patterns of abuse and oppression in which they have been socialized; and learn how to live and express boldly the deep love they feel for the world and its inhabitants. This book:

- Probes beneath the surface of the Gospel stories for the social settings and significance of Jesus’ teachings;
- Investigates how Jesus encountered and engaged the oppressive and abusive social systems of his day;
- Explores the things Jesus did as specific spiritual practices designed to change the patterns of thought and behavior of his male disciples;
- Provides practical exercises that will help the reader to apply those same practices today; and

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- Presents a practical and courageous spirituality that is balanced, daring and holistically comprehensive.

My hope for this book

That men of all ages, races, ethnicities, and political persuasions will read it and consider carefully how truly living and practicing the Way of Jesus just might provide true fulfillment of life and satisfy their hearts at the deepest level, and in the process, will benefit and bless the world around them.