

Revelation, Observation, Procrastination and Transformation

Psalm 149

Matthew 18:15-20

Romans 13:8-14

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For me, one of the most challenging things to do when preparing a worship service is to figure out the sermon title. If there is a book or a website with suggestions on how this might be done, I haven't found it. The particular challenge for this Sunday is that there is so much to work with in the scripture readings!

The Psalm this morning encourages us to, "Sing to God a new song." We have the subject of conflict and conflict resolution in the Gospel of Matthew. And, Romans doesn't just settle with one theme. In the first part of the reading we are reminded that all the commandments instruct us toward one purpose; to encounter and engage each other with love. The second part of the reading implores us to stay alert and wake up to what God is doing.

Part of me really wanted to cover all of the bases and entitle the sermon: "Celebration, Innovation, Confrontation, Revelation, Elucidation, Negotiation, Determination, Observation, Adoration, Procrastination, Dissipation, Preparation and Transformation." However, it seemed a little wordy. To pull a sermon out of such a wide range of ideas seemed like a fool-hardy endeavor.

As I read, pondered, prayed and re-read I thought of the words that we often hear after scripture is read. "Hear what the spirit is saying to the church." What came to mind was a picture of something called a "Word Cloud." Word Clouds (or Tag Clouds) are generated by computer. Data is collected from a website. The words are then arranged in an artistic manner. The most prominent words are the words that are used most frequently or appear to have the greatest significance. The words that stood out in the word cloud in my mind were:

REVELATION

OBSERVATION

PROCRASTINATION

TRANSFORMATION

Revelation:

Scripture reveals something about how we are called to be as we live our lives and engage with one another as an expression of our Christian faith. Scripture comes to us in ways that are challenging, enlightening, educational, spontaneous or carefully constructed.

Observation:

The word observation suggests to me the process or action of taking notice. How many revelations are made each day that go unobserved (unseen or unheard)? Usually, observation requires more than just a quick glance.

Several years ago, I was asked to offer leadership for a weekend youth social justice, outreach event called “Walking the Talk.” In preparation for the weekend I made a special point of walking as much as I could. I walked the girls to school. I walked to the grocery store. I walked on the beach. One of the things that came to me as I walked was that Jesus walked. He didn’t hop into his minivan and drive from one ministry opportunity to another. You can observe so much more when you walk. You connect with more people. It is difficult to simply pass by when you are not travelling at 50 kilometers per hour.

Another thing to bear in mind as we consider the importance of approaching our daily lives with intention. When my girls were very younger I used to bus to work on Sunday morning. I would leave at 6 am and Jim would be blessed with the wonderful task of getting three preschool-aged children dressed, fed and to church by 10 am. During the time that I took the bus those Sunday mornings I set the intention of seeking to encounter God each time I travelled to work. With that intention set, my mind and heart were open to encountering God in the people I met. I was blessed by significant encounters—some joy-filled, some sad and some inspiring. I was transformed by those encounters. My life was impacted.

By choosing to be intentional, my Sunday morning travel had deeper meaning because of the encounters I experienced. By choosing to slow-down and walk I was able to observe and connect with people and creation in ways that were transformative. So, what is it that gets in the way of moving from observation to transformation?

Procrastination:

To quote from the Message:

“But make sure that you don’t get so absorbed and exhausted in taking care of all your day-by-day obligations that you lose track of the time and doze off, oblivious to God. The night is about over, dawn is about to break. We can’t afford to waste a minute, must not squander these precious daylight hours in frivolity and indulgence, in sleeping around and dissipation, in bickering and grabbing everything in sight. Get out of bed and get dressed! Don’t loiter and linger, waiting until the very last minute. Dress yourselves in Christ and be up and about!”

What are the factors that cause us to procrastinate? There is a common perception that people who procrastinate are lazy. Oftentimes, nothing could be further from the truth. Some of the busiest, most hard working people I know are

world-class procrastinators. So, what could it be? It could be any one of (or all of) a myriad of things: Fear, lack of confidence, confusion, depression, a sense of being overwhelmed; and the list goes on.

In Romans, Paul raises a factor that most of us can relate to even today. We get absorbed and exhausted by our day to day obligations. We may not be squandering our precious daylight hours in frivolity and indulgence but we can get so caught up in the “doing”—the things we “have to do”—that there is little time left to observe. And, even if we are able to observe we are soon distracted from the work of responding to our observations. When this happens the opportunity for transformation is lost—or at the very least delayed.

When we work with children in the Godly Play Room the program is designed to flow logically through the process of revelation, observation and transformation. Children are welcomed and helped to be ready to hear the story. After the story children are invited to wonder about what they have just heard and seen—they are invited to access, reflect on and share their observations on a story from their own perspective. Each child’s experience or encounter with the spirit is unique and space and time is made available for the children to reflect on their observations. After the wondering, children are given some time to work with the story. This is called the response time. Children are invited to think about what they would like their work to be for the morning. To be clear, a child’s *work* is *play*. Children may choose to work directly with a story (telling, retelling or creating stories of their own); respond with some form of art media; read quietly in the cozy corner; build and construct with blocks or write. Sounds pretty much like heaven doesn’t it!

Jerome Berryman, creator of Godly Play, likens the physiological, psychological and spiritual effects of a child’s play to that of contemplative prayer. In other words as children play, transformation occurs. Adults who are fortunate enough to be present in a Godly Play Room on Sunday morning can attest to the fact that the transformation within each child radiates out to the rest of the group. As adults, we experience the transformation around us and within ourselves.

Admittedly, I do not have the nerve to suggest that it is time for us to drop all the important things we have to do and play... although I would really like to. However, I do think that there is an urgent call to make the space and time to encounter and embrace opportunities for transformation. As a faith community it is our responsibility to offer opportunities and lead by example. We know this. We have known it for a long time. However, as we struggle with the issues of paying the bills, keeping the boiler running, supporting and caring for the people who come through the door on Sunday mornings and every other day of the week we are often left with little time to reflect on our observations. In the Godly Play room the process/structure is clear. It is far more difficult to procrastinate when we know exactly what the process is that we are

required to follow. This morning's scripture readings give us some helpful hints on how we might begin to engage in this kind of work (or play).

First of all, make time always to celebrate, sing, worship, give thanks and praise to God. If we live persistently with the certain knowledge that God is with us in all time and all places we cannot help but live lives of constant transformation.

Secondly, in Matthew, we are instructed on how to fight fair. The instructions were meant specifically for communities of faith but I would guess that they would be effective in the workplace or at home.

1. Put Your Complaint into Words—Think about what it is that is making you angry or frustrated and how you might express it clearly, with words.
2. Tell the Person about It in Person—Go to the person you are angry with and tell them what you are angry about.
3. If the issue persists, seek the advice of wise people in your community.
4. Ask for the assistance of the wise people in your community.
5. Never Give up Trying.

Thirdly, to quote my good friend Ian, remember that, "It's all about love." God just wants us to love each other. In fact Ian once drew me a picture of God that was in the shape of a giant heart. His explanation was that really it was the very best way to draw God because God is love—a love that connects all people. Paul reminds us of the timeless message as he recites some of the commandments given to the people of God as they wandered in the desert and they were overcome with the many challenges that make it so difficult to live lives transformed. The commandments all point to the same thing: "Love other people as you do yourself. You can't go wrong when you love others. When you add up everything in the commandments, the sum total is love."

Finally, there is no time like the present. In fact our very lives depend on our understanding that we must not put off doing and being aware of those things that help us to become aware of God's transforming presence in the world and in our lives. Paul implores us to dress ourselves in Christ and be up and about. Embrace and engage in living intentionally as followers and companions of Jesus.

How do we do this? In his book, *A Portrait of Jesus*, Marcus Borg suggests that, "How we think about Jesus will very much affect what we think the Christian life is most centrally about." Borg sees the historical Jesus as having three dimensions: A spirit dimension; a wisdom dimension; and a political dimension.

The **Spirit** dimension: A life centered in spirit is centered in God.

The **Wisdom** dimension: Jesus' alternative wisdom leads to a life whose fruit is growth in compassion not in righteousness. To take Jesus seriously is to embody his example and vision of compassion and inclusiveness.

The **Political** dimension: Jesus was a social prophet. He knew that political structures profoundly impact human life. He knew that bad political structures

are the single greatest source of suffering in human history. To care about human beings means to care about devising more humane and just and compassionate social structures.

One of the visions that have informed the work of the past year Strategic Planning process at DHUC has been that we seek always to grow in wisdom, strength and faith as we seek to live in intentional Christian community. This kind of vision is so important, so vital to the survival of our faith community (and I would argue the world) that we can no longer be afforded any time to procrastinate... to put off till tomorrow... to hope that things will simply fall into place or "get back to normal." This is a challenge and a gift all rolled into one. The challenge is that the work is big and will be met with much resistance. The gift is an open, imploring invitation to make space in our lives and our hearts to engage with the spirit of love, wisdom, compassion and transformation that has been there since the beginning of time. May we find the will and the ways to respond to this invitation with an unfettered and resounding, "YES!"