

The Healing Way

Ephesians 2:1-10 John 3:14-21

Preached by Richard Bolin at Trinity United Methodist Church

March 15, 2015

During this Lenten season we are journeying on “The Way” with Jesus. We began with “The Salvation Way,” that is, God’s way of saving us, which is to take the initiative, to give us Life, to love us unconditionally from the dawn of creation and then invite us to respond. Then we spoke of “The Crosswalk Way,” which is our response to God’s love by following the path of Jesus. Jim and Jean Strathdee helped us examine “The Just Way,” which seeks to right the wrongs of our human stratifications, acting on behalf of the poor and the oppressed.



Today we walk “The Healing Way.” Our journey began with the love of God and the love of God heals us along the way. Though winds and floods may buffet us, though fires and every kind of human calamity may try us, finally, because the love of God is real, our lives are redeemed. We are made whole. We are returned to the place that God has always intended us to be. To be at home with God, this is what it means to be healed. As it says in the concluding sentence in this morning’s reading from Ephesians: “We are what God has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before hand to be our way of life.” (Ephesians 2:10)

A friend posted an anonymous quote on Facebook: “Maybe the journey isn’t so much about becoming anything. Maybe it’s about un-becoming everything that isn’t really you so you can be who you were meant to be in the first place.” (Alexander Technique Teacher Facebook post, December 7, 2014)

I made an immediate connection with a quote from Richard Rohr, noted in a review of his most recent book, *The Alternative Way of Francis of Assisi*: “The Franciscan priest Richard Rohr has written some thirty books,” The reviewer notes, “many of which are variations on the same theme. Not long into this book he says as much in a footnote. The idea that ‘our deepest identity is hidden from us,’ and that the purpose of authentic religion is to help us recover our true identity in God, is ‘the core message of this entire book, and really my only message in all of my books.’” (From Daniel Clendenin’s Book Review of Richard Rohr’s *Eager to Love; The Alternative Way of Francis of Assisi*. pp. 66, 276). I

would say that is a worthy message to be at the core of ones life work, that the purpose of authentic religion is to recover our true identity in God.

Or, in the language of Ephesians, "We are what God has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before hand to be our way of life." (Ephesians 2:10)

Or, in the anonymous bit of wisdom posted on Facebook: "Maybe the journey isn't so much about becoming anything. Maybe it's about un-becoming everything that isn't really you so you can be who you were meant to be in the first place."

When we experience the love of God, we are healed. We are made whole. We are returned to the place that God has always intended us to be.

How does this happen, as we travel along the way?

The legendary wisdom of Solomon is exemplified by the familiar Biblical story about two women both claiming to be the mother of the same child. When Solomon judged the case he ordered that the child be cut in half. One of the women then acquiesced, saying that the other could have the child. Solomon then ruled that this woman was the true mother of the child, because she cared the most about the child's well being.

In Japan traditional stories are told about a great judge named Ooka. His wisdom is celebrated in a story similar to the one told about Solomon, but turned a bit inside out.¹ One day a case came to Ooka's court concerning a baby boy. Two women claimed to be its mother, and Ooka was faced with the problem of deciding which woman was telling the truth. Both women had recently come to old Tokyo, and so there were no witnesses to support either claim.

Thinking that the child himself would be sure to recognize his own mother, the judge placed him in the middle of the floor, expecting him to crawl toward one of the women. But the child paid no attention to either of the two women, and cried for Ooka to pick him up.

A murmur of amusement ran around the courtroom. Ooka's ears began to turn pink.

The great judge soon thought of another test, however, He ordered the two women to take hold of one of the baby's arms and to pull as hard as they were able.

"I am sure the real mother will be given strength so that she will win the struggle," he explained. What he really expected was the real mother would stop pulling the child, for fear of hurting him.

But the two women were not fooled by Ooka's cleverness, and told the judge they knew he was playing a trick.

¹ Adapted from "Ooka and the Wasted Wisdom," *Fair is Fair: World Folktales of Justice*, edited by Sharon Creeden, August House, 1995, p. 39.

Ooka sighed. Finally he called a court attendant and said, "Go buy me a bowl of goldfish, a handful of bamboo sticks, three pieces of wood, a magnifying glass, and a copy of a book on fortunetelling."

To Ooka's embarrassment, loud laughter spread around the courtroom, as the spectators decided that at last the great judge was defeated by a case.

Ooka quickly called for silence. His ears were very red.

Soon the attendant returned with the articles Ooka had requested. Ooka spread them out carefully in front of him. "Now it is obvious to me — as it is to all of you — that I cannot solve this case," he said. "Nevertheless, I shall arrive at a just decision, for I shall use these articles to look into the future. There I shall see what my decision should be."

The spectators were astonished. Ooka had always used logic and common sense to solve cases. They had never known him to rely on such superstition as fortunetelling.

Gravely, the judge took each of the objects and studied them carefully, consulting the fortunetelling book from time to time. He rolled the bamboo sticks to learn their secret. He counted the bubbles in the goldfish bowl. He held the pieces of wood to his ears, and listened to their echoes. Finally, he studied the two women's palms.

All this Ooka did very thoroughly and slowly, and by the time he had finished, the crowd had become very restless. Everyone was relieved when at last the judge said, "I see it quite clearly now, I have used all the best methods of foreseeing the future, and they all give the same answer. Therefore what I see must be the truth."

Ooka paused and looked around the courtroom. The spectators waited anxiously to hear what Ooka had learned.

The judge continued. "I saw very clearly the real mother with her son as they will be twenty years from now. The boy had met with an accident and was a helpless invalid. His mother was working in the rice fields to support him."

Both women gasped in horror. Ooka looked at each of them with compassion, then continued, "and the woman I saw in my vision was — "

"Stop!" cried one of the women. "It was not I! Children are supposed to take care of their parents when they become old, not the other way around."

"Is that so?" Ooka said. He turned to the other woman, "And how do you feel about my prophecy?" he asked.

"It is frightening," she said, "but it makes no difference. I will care for my child as long as I am able."

"Then this is really your true son," said the judge. "The other wanted him only so that he could take care of her in her old age. Take the child with the court's good wishes."

The happy mother took the child in her arms. Ooka said casually, "Oh, I forgot to finish the prophecy. The child recovered from the injury I saw. He

became rich and famous. His mother, his fine wife, and thirteen children lived happily together for many, many years.”

Surely enough, Ooka's prophecy came true. Everyone was surprised except the judge. "If I had not been called to the law," he often said later, "I would probably have made an excellent fortuneteller.”

Ooka knew the mother by her willingness to sacrifice for her child.

For God so loved the world ... for God so loves the world!

Referring to himself Jesus said that the Son of Man must be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. He is lifted up in a life of stories and teachings so that we might know the love of God. He is lifted up on the cross so that we might see the love of God. He is lifted up in the resurrection so that we might experience the love of God - and through knowing the love of God and seeing the love of God and experiencing the love of God we might have Life and have it abundantly.

In Jesus we see how great is God's love for all the children of creation. Look at Jesus and see the healing grace of God. This God would spend an eternity laboring in the rice fields, so that the children of creation might have life!

Ooka the judge is careful to make his story have a happy ending. The mother was willing to sacrifice much for her child, but Ooka assures her that indeed her child will be healthy and prosperous, and traditional blessings shall come to the family.

God's story also has a happy ending. When we see the grace of God we are healed and creation is redeemed. Know this: that the Creator of Life has imparted to each of us a sacred worth, so that, regardless of anything else, we may know that we are the children of a loving God.

When we experience the love of God we are healed. We are reborn, or we might say that we are re-formed into our original-blessing self, the self whose first impulse is to give oneself away for the sake of our children. That is the happy ending. "For we are what God has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before hand to be our way of life." God's purpose is being worked out in us and through us. Though winds and floods may buffet us, though fires and every kind of human calamity may try us, finally, because the love of God is real, we are made whole. We are healed. Thanks be to God.