

Pastoral Message: October 31, 2021

As I reflected on the weekend readings, I was drawn to a line by preacher and theologian, Walter Burghardt, that the spiritual life is about learning to take “A long loving look at the real.” We discussed in Bible study this week that we can see some beautiful things in our world, but also some really mean things. To love is to become more sensitive to reality around us, as Burghardt points out, and to lovingly look at it as God does. How does God view reality? I think, if we look specifically at the life of Jesus, it shows that what destroys life breaks God’s heart, but what brings forth life God celebrates. We reflected in our Bible study this week on some of the destructive forces such as division, racism, and mean signs. To love in a real way is to allow this to break our hearts, and, by grace, how do we respond in love. I learned an interesting insight this past week about this beautiful Jewish prayer known as the Shema, “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, The Lord alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength. Take to heart these words which I enjoin on you today.” The Rabbi Sacks points out that actually there is really no Hebrew word for obedience, that they would have to create one for things like military service. The Hebrew Scriptures really do not use this word, and it does not translate well when we use this word in English, but the more appropriate words would be to listen. The Jewish belief is we cannot see God but we experience God through listening to the word. If you put this into the framework of the Hebrew Scriptures, we experience God through listening to the events of human history like the exodus, through the words of the prophets, through creation itself, etc. I would suggest, that as we prepare for synod, this is our call: to be a people on a journey and to actively listen to hear the Lord.

This past week I had an experience of this when parishioners Leonard and Helen Harris gave me a tour of the Ramer School. This was a segregated school that Leonard attended. As Leonard and Helen were sharing about their experiences of racism and how they had worked in the community to desegregate, I was in awe because I was listening to truly living history. This school had a black principal by the name Mr. Ramer. What was inspiring is, with all the challenges of racism, the gift of beautiful people and the things that they worked through to accomplish. One example Leonard told me was that if you were black and a veteran you could not be buried in War Memorial Park. Leonard shared with me how he worked to integrate that park. There is so much history at Ramer School, and I learned so much off of Helen and Leonard. Hopefully we all will take an opportunity to make this visit. The visit for me was a living experience of synodality because it was listening to Helen and Leonard’s journey and the struggle of injustice, but the joy they shared of working for justice. I really feel that the more we pay attention and listen to this living history it can help bring healing to our country. God certainly would celebrate seeing that reality.