

“The Virtue of Acceptance”

Luke 10:1-9 & 17-20 & Nehemiah 8:10

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A disciple once said to the Master, “How can I be a great person like you?” “Why be a great person?” said the Master. “Being a person is a great enough achievement.”

The virtue of acceptance is the capacity to find joy in the moment, to work with what is, to celebrate what you have, to celebrate where you are, and to celebrate who you are. Acceptance is the resourcefulness to discover gifts in the present, imperfect moment and lovingly share those gifts. Acceptance is the ability to rejoice and delight in the quirkiness, even the inconsistency of the people we know, and to realize that many of the struggles they have are related to their strengths.

Your and my worth comes from being a beloved child of God. Being yourself is a great enough achievement. Richard Rohr wrote, “One of Jesus’ most revealing one-liners is, **Luke 10:20 ‘Rejoice only that your name is written in heaven!’** If we could fully trust this, it would change our whole life agenda. This discovery will not create overstated or presumptuous individualists, as religion usually fears, but instead makes all posturing and pretending largely unnecessary. Our core anxiety that we are not good enough is resolved from the beginning and we can stop all our climbing, contending, criticizing, and competing. All “accessorizing” of any small, fragile self henceforth shows itself to be a massive waste of time and energy. Costume jewelry is just that, a small part of an already unnecessary costume.”

Jesus said, **Luke 10:7b MSG “Don’t move from house to house, looking for the best cook in town.”** Acceptance enjoys what you have. Celebrate what you got rather than wasting time constantly looking for a better meal, a better home, better friends, a better view, a better deal. Celebrate who you are right now without saying “but” or “I wish”. Let go of thinking when I am ... or accomplish... then I will celebrate.

Jesus sent seventy-two disciples out and they were successful in casting out demons. Jesus cautions them to not rejoice because of their achievements for there will be times when they fail, rather rejoice in being God’s beloved child.

Luke 10:1-9, 17-20 NLT “The Lord now chose seventy-two other disciples and sent them ahead in pairs to all the towns and places he planned to visit. These were his instructions to them: “The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask God to send more workers into God’s fields. Now go, and remember that I am sending you out as lambs among wolves. Don’t take any money with you, nor a traveler’s bag, nor an extra pair of sandals. And don’t stop to greet anyone on the road. “Whenever you enter someone’s home, first say, ‘May God’s peace be on this house.’ If those who live there are peaceful, the blessing will stand; if they are not, the blessing will return to you. Don’t move around from home to home. Stay in one place, eating and drinking what they provide. Don’t hesitate to accept hospitality, because those who work deserve their pay. “If you enter a town and it welcomes you, eat whatever is set before you. Heal the sick, and tell them, ‘The Kingdom of God is near you now.’ When the seventy-two disciples returned, they joyfully reported to Jesus, “Lord, even the demons obey us when we use your name!” “Yes,” Jesus told them, “I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning! Look, I have given you authority over all the power of the enemy, and you can walk among snakes and scorpions and crush them. Nothing will injure you. But don’t rejoice because evil spirits obey you; rejoice because your names are registered in heaven.”

What are the demons for you today? One of my demons is my struggle with acceptance. I have made great strides in my personal life, yet I continue to struggle with acceptance in ministry.

Growing up on the farm I would work with great intensity always striving to complete the milking and complete the field work. When that was finished, I wanted order, organizing the machine shop. When that was finished, I wanted cleanliness of the barn. When that was finished, I wanted all the equipment serviced. I never rejoiced because my work was never done, it was never good enough. I always had to get more done before I could rejoice. My dad found joy in every moment.

In college I could not accept myself as being good enough. I always wanted to be better. I would not rest until my studies were complete. My three roommates made a bet that whoever has the lowest GPA would buy

the others a steak dinner. I was never good enough. All of my roommates had a perfect 4.0 throughout college. I got one B my first trimester so I always lost. Looking back my anxious disappointment of my grades was silly for I should have been celebrating my academic accomplishments.

Even in my leisure, I struggle with the demon of a lack of acceptance. When I went to a museum, I would not linger to enjoy an item that was inspiring to me; because, I had to see the entire museum. Leslie was exhausted whenever we took Spencer and Abigail to an amusement park because we could not celebrate until we went on every ride, getting the full economic value out of the cost of admission. When I backpacked, I always needed to go further because the view might be better ahead. I have missed out on a lot of rejoicing because of the lack of acceptance demon.

On the sabbatical, I truly rejoiced in every moment. There were times when I started to wonder, what is around the bend, then I looked around rejoicing in the moment. There were times when our schedule changed, when I wanted to be in control, then I resisted that demon by opening myself to the unplanned adventure that was unfolding.

One day in Kauai, we were scheduled to take a boat ride along the Na Pali coast, a rugged section of the island with spectacular lush cliffs, pristine beaches, and colorful snorkeling. The trip was rescheduled for the next day due to extreme waves. The next day again it was unsafe, so we went on a voyage on the other side of the island that was protected from the wind driven waves. It was a marvelous experience. The view was beautiful. We saw whales, dolphins, and seals. The food was abundant, the service was exceptional, because they had 60 reservations but only a dozen of us showed up. A few of us went snorkeling. Everyone, but one crew member and I, went back on board the boat because the fish were not as abundant and the coral was not as colorful as it would have been on the other side of the island. I was enjoying the beauty that was there when two green sea turtles came up and swam with me. We even looked each other in the eye. Later, Leslie and I were enjoying the view and being with each other. I was rejoicing in my beautiful, wonderful wife and everything. It was then that I heard another couple complaining. They were frustrated the trip got delayed messing up their schedule. They grumbled, the snorkeling would have been better on the other side. They whined that they could see people, houses, and roads, the other side would have only stunning natural beauty. They moaned, we did not get to be the only people on a secluded beach. They lamented, they will likely never get to see the Na Pali Coast. They concluded, it was an awful day. Leslie and I hugged and rejoiced.

For the most part, I have overcome the unacceptance demon in my personal life. Now I am striving to have acceptance in my ministry which is a conundrum, for by striving to be more accepting in the moment I am not accepting the way I am now.

Per Jesus' instruction the disciples went out casting out all sorts of demons. They came back to Jesus eagerly sharing their achievements. Jeanne Mayo writes, "As a good mentor, Jesus surely first offers a Messianic high-five and affirms their fruit. But then he offers this correction: **Luke 10:17 NIV "Do not rejoice that the demons submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven"** In other words: "Let's talk about your source of joy. I am glad things went well and you felt good about the crowd's feedback. But you can't base your joy around your performance, people's responses or even the apparent results. Instead anchor your joy-level in the fact that you all have reserved seats in heaven."

Accepting the present moment regardless of success or failure and whatever our emotion cycle is challenging. At other times, the disciples failed to cast out demons. Jesus wants them and us to rejoice always.

The prophet Nehemiah declared, **Nehemiah 8:10 NLT "Don't be dejected and sad, for the joy of the Lord is your strength!"** When we misplace our joy in anything or anyone other than God we are also misplacing the source of our strength which leads to burn out.

Jesus knows that our work, service, and love will all fail at times. That's why Jesus wants our satisfaction and self-worth to be anchored in God, not our performance. Jesus acknowledges that earthly life won't always feel good, won't go as planned, won't always hit the right notes, yet God is a steadfast, everlasting source of joy, life, and love.

To joyfully accept the moment one needs to let go of limiting beliefs, dwelling on the past, worrying about the future, complaining, resistance to change, blaming others, negative self talk, the need to impress others, the need for approval, the need to always be right.

To a person who was forever complaining about others the Master said, “If it is peace you want, seek to change yourself, not other people. It is easier to protect your feet with slippers than to carpet the whole of the earth.”

In the movie, *Bridge of Spies*, the spy faces all sorts of difficult circumstances. Several times he is asked, “Are you worried?” He replies, “Would it help?” Facing death the spy is asked, “Are you afraid?” Again he replies, “Would it help?”

My spiritual director often reminds me to be indifferent to the outcome. Whenever you find yourself serving with others, share your perspective, then leave room for the Holy Spirit and the ideas of others, by being indifferent to the outcome. Accept the outcome. Find joy in the outcome.

How do you accept the moment when you or someone you love is battling cancer? By accepting yourself, by being yourself. Don’t try to be profound or wise, or insightful or inspiring. Accept yourself. Don’t try to think of the ideal thing to say. Accept your relationship, say and do what comes naturally, listen, sometimes silence is a blessing. Don’t worry that you will say or do the wrong thing. If you accept yourself, accept them, and accept the situation, your love will shine. Don’t get stuck in the past. Don’t worry about the future. Enjoy each moment with them.

It is the love and joy we receive from God and share our unique essence, our soul, that is eternal. Nothing, no disease, nothing will ever diminish the true, good us. Even in our darkest valley, we rejoice for God is with us, supplying blessings, joy, and love. Accept every moment. Accept others. Accept yourself. Amen