

“A Journey of Love and Unknowing”

Genesis 12:1-3, 1 John 4:16b-20, Luke 15:1-16

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Richard Rohr said, “We must never presume that we see. We must always be ready to see anew.”

Last week I shared how I saw anew as I looked up at the stars. I saw anew how small I am, yet I have value because of God’s love for me. I saw anew joy even in hard, messy situations. I saw anew that my worries are fleeting; joy and love are eternal. I saw anew how easy it is to become driven in work, in acquiring stuff, in trying to fulfill expectations that I miss the joy and love all around me and in me. I saw anew how I miss most of the joy and love God wants me to discover, savor, and enjoy. I saw anew that it is in receiving and sharing joy and love that people come together in harmony.

As I looked up at the stars, light traveling for thousands of light years, light traveling from galaxies full of planets, I saw anew how the more I know, I realize how much more there is to know. We keep finding that our cosmos is bigger and finding smaller particles. It appears there is no end in big or small rather the only limitation is our ability to perceive. It is the same with love and joy. The more we love we discover that there is even more love to share, the more we are joyful we discover that there is even more joy to savor. The more we experience God the more we discover that God is bigger, more glorious, more gracious, more wonderful and on and on than we knew the instant before. We will discover grandeur and grandeur aspects of God’s joyful love for eternity.

We are blessed by God to bless others. Genesis tells of the call and covenant with Abraham and Sarah. **Genesis 12:1-3 “The Lord had said to Abram, “Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father’s family, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you.”**

What is it about Sarah and Abraham that God choose to bless everyone through them? Was it their ability to see anew, to gaze up at the night sky, to always be growing and discovering more; more lands, more people, more joy, more love, more obedience to God, more wandering, more awareness of their unknowing. Abraham and Sarah’s life was full of blunders; yet, it seems they were always growing in love.

The more I know, I realize how little I know and how much more there is for me to learn. We are only able to perceive a snippet of God’s knowledge, joy, and love.

In Hawaii Leslie and I saw petroglyphs, hand carvings in lava rock in a place of spectacular beauty between the ocean and the volcano. Petroglyphs are stick figures of people, believed to be carved around a thousand years ago. There are different perspectives as to their meaning. Many believe this was a way they worshipped God. Shortly after the birth of a child the family and community would come together in the same place and add a stick figure. Every stick figure was connected with a line, for each person was part of the loving community, called by God to love and care for each other. Each stick figure had a circle depression where the umbilical cord was placed. God was worshipped for being the source of life. They praised God for the twinkling stars, the beautiful roar of the ocean, and the reddish glow of magma. They praised God for each other, for family, for community, for love shared. They dedicated each child to God, praying for God to bless the child and help the child love God and everyone.

A couple of months ago I knew nothing about their worship or their ritual of the petroglyphs which seems a lot like baptism. How does God view these people, their worship and their love? I do not know. I am discovering every moment that God’s grace is more immense than I previously perceived. Currently we celebrate God’s grace that welcomes us into God’s family with the ritual of baptism. In the past it was circumcision, maybe even petroglyphs. What will baptism be like a thousand years from now?

The same faith community that worshipped through the petroglyphs buried those who died along the sea cliffs. They believed that at death God resurrects the soul enabling the soul to leap off the cliff and fly home with God.

In Africa we were greeted by a Muslim man who was joyful, generous, compassionate, and loving. He drove us everywhere and fed us hearty, delicious meals. When he noticed that one of the schools had a dirt floor for the kindergarten class, in one week he coordinated a crew to concrete the floor. He paid for all of it in full. When he saw how a deaf school was not getting the financial support promised by the government, he vowed to advocate for the school. This man was loving.

First John declares. **1 John 4:16b-20** “**God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face God with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world. Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced God’s perfect love. We love each other because God loved us first. If someone says, “I love God,” but hates a fellow believer, that person is a liar; for if we don’t love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see?”**

What do you know about a Muslim’s relationship with God? How about those who made the petroglyphs? Throughout the Bible, one can find inclusive and exclusive scripture. Are there many paths that unite with God? Are there many paths but ultimately they all converge and go through Jesus? Is there only one path, a wide Universal Christian path? Is there only one narrow path to God requiring specific works through a specific denomination with specific practices and a specific standing in a specific church? How does God want you to live your daily life? Does God want everyone to live the same or does God want different people to live their life differently? How should we worship? What songs should we sing? What style? Views on all of these points varies greatly throughout time and around the world. I know enough to realize I don’t know. I have lots of ideas, beliefs, and interpretations of God’s will. I resonate with our Presbyterian belief that the more we share our insights the deeper our understanding of God’s will. I strive to live the most loving way. In the midst of all these questions are more questions, the more we know—the more unknowing. What absolute truths should we proclaim together? How do we worship Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life and worship our Triune God of grace for all people, who calls us to bless all people and to love all people?

Recently I learned that several Christian theologians who once wrote about how to worship God journeyed to a place of unknowing. As they journeyed through life they made fewer statements, so they could ask more questions. They focused less on limiting law, so they could focus more on freeing grace. They perceived fewer absolutes, so they could be in awe of God’s mystery. Their knowing led to unknowing. One commented that religions are sign posts along the road that point us to God. The journey is nurturing loving relationships with God and each other, not stopping and debating the merits and validity of the signs.

What does the parable of the lost sheep reveal to you? **Luke 15:1-6** “**Tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to Jesus teach. This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain that Jesus was associating with such sinful people—even eating with them! So Jesus told them this story: “If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won’t he leave the ninety-nine others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders. When he arrives, he will call together his friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.’”**

Our perception of people and situations often quickly becomes distorted. Often we think we know what happened, but reality is very different. My first day back a person came up to me and said. “I heard you made the children cry?” Perplexed I said, “What?” They replied. “In Africa the children cried because the last time they saw a white person someone was shot.” I assured them that I did not make any children cry in Africa. I was having a wonderful time with a group of children. Kara and Coleen were with another group of younger children, who at first cried because the last time they saw a white person they gave them immunization shots. In reality there was love. Our love for the children. The love of the person who gave the immunization shots. The love of people of different colors serving each other. Yet, somehow the story became one of fear and division. Often we are unable to grasp a knowing of even a simple situation that has just happened. A thousand years from now what story will be told about our worship and love?

There was a man who invented the art of making fire. He took his tools and went to a tribe in the north, where it was very cold, bitterly cold. He taught the people there to make fire. The people were very interested. He showed them the uses to which they could put fire – they could cook, keep warm, etc. They were so grateful that they had learned the art of making fire. But before they could express their gratitude to the man, he

disappeared. He wasn't concerned with getting their recognition or gratitude; he was concerned about their well-being. He went to another tribe, where he again began to show them the value of his invention. People were interested there, too, a bit too interested for the peace of mind of their priests, who began to notice that this man was drawing crowds and they were losing their popularity. So they decided to do away with him. They poisoned him, crucified him, put it any way you like. But they were afraid that the people might turn against them, so they were wily. They had a portrait of the man made, and mounted it on the main altar of the temple. The instruments for making fire were placed in front of the portrait, and the people were taught to revere the portrait and to pay reverence to the instruments of fire, which they dutifully did for centuries. The veneration and the worship went on, but there was no fire.

Jesus came to teach us how to love. Each person, each church, each denomination spends a great deal of time and energy debating how we should love, sometimes so much that we become frustrated with each other, sometimes to the point where we stop loving each other. Would Jesus rather have us fight over what each of us thinks is right or have us love each other? How can one best help another deepen their relationship with God? By condemning them, legislating a lifestyle, imposing your knowledge upon them? Or loving them? This story makes me wonder how I worship rituals, traditions, beliefs, statements, ideals instead of worshiping God? How I impose my beliefs on another instead of loving them?

In the York household what is more loving? To force everyone to load the dishwasher my way or let each person load the dishwasher in their own way? As long as the dishes get clean and are not damaged does it matter how they are loaded?

David Webber said, "Christian unity is based upon me loving Christ enough, to love you enough, to let you be different ... to let you have different points of view ... to let you have different ways of seeing things."

My spiritual directors ask me lots of questions. Sometimes they tell a story and then ask lots of questions. Rarely have they ever told me what to do, or believe, or how to love. Spiritual directors ask lots of questions.

Today we celebrate Pentecost, the birth of the Christian church, the guidance of the Holy Spirit that inspires every person to love. The Holy Spirit filled them enabling them to talk in different languages and understand each other. Was each of them expressing their personal way of loving God, receiving God's love and loving others? Was the Holy Spirit enabling them to passionately express their unique view, facet and style while also enabling them to appreciate each person's different perspective, different way of love? The Holy Spirit united them in love and empowered them with love which attracted others to join them in love.

How should we do this today? I do not know. I have ideas. I have a perspective, one tongue, one language. Today we will listen to each other and identify together some ways we will love God, each other and the world. With God's blessing and grace hopefully we will identify some ways that we will draw others to join us on a journey of ever growing joy and love. We must never presume that we see. We must always be ready to see anew. Amen