

Thursday in the Fourth Week of Easter: April 29, 2021

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus teaches and heals the afflicted in places of worship on the Sabbath Day, challenging those in positions of religious authority. However, others in the crowds sought Jesus, listening to what he had to say about the generosity of the Source of All Life and Love and watching him bring wholeness to those who were sick or greatly troubled. Jesus chooses twelve to walk with him and to learn from him. A great multitude gathered on a portion of level ground and crowded close to Jesus.

Read Luke 6:37-49. What catches my attention in this gospel passage?

In speaking about the blessings of poverty and misfortune as well as the curses of wealth and privilege, Jesus gives direction to those who seek to build trust, to share enthusiasm as events in life's journey unfold, and to care for all Human Beings and every part of creation.

It is fascinating that Jesus expects that those who walk with him and put his teachings into practice will encounter other people who will harm them, take their possessions, and attempt to erase whatever good which they have done in the past. What motivation would any Human Being have to journey through life under these circumstances looking towards such a bleak future? The answer to this question can be found in the life experiences of those who crowd Jesus on the plain and seek healing. Jesus knows that those present experience the brutality of poverty, struggle to put food on the table for their older relatives, their children, and their grandchildren, suffer with feelings of profound sadness with the loss of loved ones, and bear the brunt of violence perpetrated by those will maintain their positions of power and privilege at any cost. Jesus understands the presence of evil in this world. Jesus also acknowledges the challenges in breaking cycles of poverty, finding food to eat, overcoming grief and multiple losses, and putting an end to hatred and violence. This is not easy work to do. In these practical teachings about these realities in life, Jesus provides reassurance that this way of life is possible and that those who put into practice what he teaches will find the creative energy to do so. According to Jesus, his teachings are based on a simple and just principle, **"Do to others what you would have them do to you."** Luke 6:31. Jesus demonstrates his belief that Human Beings seek to experience the best possible outcomes for not only themselves and their descendants but for each and every Human Being. These are not unrealistic expectations. Jesus knows that Creator and Great Spirit are generous in providing everything that Human Beings need to live, that Creator and Great Spirit are continuing to create new life in this creation, and that Creator and Great Spirit are loving to all, including the ungrateful and the wicked. Jesus looks at Human Beings and sees the presence and intention of The Source of All Life and Love. Human Beings have the capacity to respond with gratitude not only to the Source of All Life and Love but also to learn from the many different messengers sent to teach us along our journey towards a more equitable and just future. Human Beings do not need to forget the cruelty of particular individuals and the indifference of others but we need to let go of the bitterness and the drive for revenge which can become overwhelming and incapacitating. Forgiveness produces resilience and the creative energy to move forward, particularly for those who have experienced harm and continue to be impacted by oppressive dynamics. Jesus points out the importance of finding Teachers whose life experience and good heart helps to make changes in our lives and in the world around us.

Reread Luke 6:27-49. What is God saying to us?

In her book **BRAIDING SWEETGRASS: INDIGENOUS WISDOM, SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE, AND THE TEACHINGS OF PLANTS (Milkweed Editions, Canada, 2013)**, Robin Wall Kimmerer recounts the work of one individual in regenerating the old growth rainforest climbing up from the Pacific Ocean into the coastal mountains of Oregon.

For thousands of years, trees grew to heights over 90 metres or 300 feet with trunks becoming 15 metres or 50 feet round. The Redwoods growing up from the shores of the Pacific Ocean up the Coast Mountains grew even larger. In the 1880's, aggressive clearcutting of Douglas Fir provided timber for the growing cities of western USA. When the young Douglas Fir grew tall enough to replace their ancestors, loggers returned and clear-cut this generation. As a result, the cycle of natural regeneration was interrupted. Soils broken in the taking down of these behemoths and exposed to the warmth of the sun and the rainfall heated up the watersheds and swirled down the empty slopes toward the ocean. Waterways for the salmon warmed and habitat for forest creatures was destroyed. In those days, loggers told themselves, "You could never cut all of the old growth." Western Red Cedar were cut down in subsequent periods of logging so the old cedars disappeared too. Chain saws and cranes modernized the work of loggers and increased their capability of clearcutting more old growth trees in shorter periods of time with smaller workforces. In places, genetically modified Douglas Fir were planted in rows up mountain slopes, establishing ecological monocultures. Since Douglas Fir is resistant to chemical herbicides, helicopters spray large sections of bramble, bushes which bear a variety of berries, and young deciduous trees in order to allow these Douglas Fir to grow upwards without having their growth impeded by canopies of other shrubs, and quick growing deciduous trees such as alders and maples.

An accountant took early retirement and purchased forty acres of clear-cut land to homestead as his grandparents had done in Oregon in their generation. Franz Dolp hoped to use the felled Western Red Cedar who had been left on the ground to rot in the original clear-cut since these trees were not of value to the earliest loggers. Because cedar takes centuries to break down completely and return to the land, this modern pioneer found that he needed to purchase cedar in order to build a home for his family. On this land, Franz Dolp developed a dream to regenerate the old growth forest and opened himself to learn all that he could about how to accomplish this task. After his marriage broke down and this property was sold, Franz Dolp returned and repurchased this property. As a wounded man, he picked up this work to heal a wounded forest. Franz Dolp kept journals, describing what he saw and what he learned. Dr. Kimmerer points out that pioneer species like berry-laden bushes, brambles, and vine-maples produce "communities based on principles of unlimited growth, sprawl, and high energy consumption, sucking up resources as fast as they can, wrestling land from others through competition, and then moving on". In contrast, old growth forests operate on different principles based on conditions of scarcity underneath layers of foliage. Old growth forests communities are produced without a frenzy of uncontrolled growth or waste of resources, instead modelling efficiency and self-sufficiency. Franz Dolp learned where to best plant different kinds of trees on his property. Douglas Fir were planted on sunny open slopes. Hemlock needed shade. Cedar needed dimly lit, wet ground. Instead of getting rid of young alder and maples as recommended by the Oregon Forest Practices Act, Franz Dolp used the maples to rebuild the soil as well as to provide shade for other trees to survive.

Over the years, Franz Dolp planted thirteen thousand trees and “tinkered” with the quick-growing undergrowth so these trees would flourish. The watershed started to heal. Other forest dwellers thrived on the generosity of the young Western Red Cedar as well as the Douglas Fir and Hemlock. In sharing his vision to regenerate old growth forest, Franz Dolp invited others to help him with this task, co-creating the Spring Creek Project for writers, artists, scientists, and philosophers to attend retreats on the land. His untimely death in a collision with a paper mill truck on his way to Shotpouch Creek brought his labour of love to an end but left 40 acres to return to old growth forest.

Reread Luke 6:27-49. What is God asking us to be and do?

Spend time in forests and along waterways, imagining what parts of the planet had been like for thousands of years and the reciprocal relationships which had developed between Human Beings and non-humans. Learn about what has happened to the forests and waterways since Settlers have arrived. Seek others who dream about making changes in order for forests to flourish and healthy waterways to sustain aquatic life as the Source of All Life and Love intends.

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