

“How to Mend a Broken Truth”

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Philippians 2: 1-13

Please pray with me. Holy God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be faithful and pleasing unto you, for you are our rock and our salvation. Amen.

Our scripture reading today reminds us that being united with Christ means that we are united with everyone and everything. Christ has formed a covenant with all of creation, making us one with creation: with the animals, the trees, the breezes and lakes. We are one with all peoples on this earth. We are one with people from other countries, as well as with immigrants, migrant workers and refugees. We are even one with our siblings and neighbors who drive us crazy or who anger or disappoint us.

Both the scripture for today and the story I read remind us that actually feeling one with others is very difficult. We have a tendency to turn other people, or the animals, or the earth into a “they” or a “them.” The earth is not human, so we can value it less. *They* have different color skin or express gender and sexuality differently than I do. *They* wear different clothing or worship differently than I do. *They* behave differently, care for themselves, their children or their home differently from the way I do. *They* manage their money and their lives differently than I do. *They* are from a different country, speak a different language, have different values than I do. *They* are different and other.

And when we think of people as different or as “other,” something changes in our brains, in the way we relate to them and value them. We start thinking in term of “us” versus “them.” We start to think of them as if they are a little bit less than we are, or at least as if they are on some kind of opposing side—which means that our side should win or maybe that our side is the side that matters. If they are on an opposing side and certainly if they are less than us, we can judge them, or hurt them, or maybe not care if they are hurt by others. We can close ourselves off to what they say and how they are treated because, since they are on the opposing side or since they are not “US”, what they say shouldn't matter as much to us. In *Old Turtle and the Broken Truth*, and in our daily lives, we see that the people cause great suffering for themselves and one another. They hurt the earth by polluting and using up resources. They go to war with one another, or hurt one another through mean-spirited actions or through cruel battles of words.

Specifically, in his letter to the Phillipians, Paul says that we are to humbly regard others as better than us and to look to their interests before our own. Likewise, Jesus provides us with a startling commandment: we are to love one another as Jesus has loved us. That's a pretty significant commitment—loving others as God has loved us and putting others' needs before our own.

Now, I will pause here to note that Paul didn't write this recommendation to people who were already self-sacrificial in nature. He was writing to a community that tended to regard itself as better than others, thinking of other nationalities and cultures as barbarian, and their own as superior. It's important to know this context because, if we're not careful, we can apply this recommendation of self-sacrifice inaccurately. Too often, it has been used as bludgeon to force minorities and women into a more subservient role than they already hold in many societies. What Paul is doing here, though, is asking those of us with any kind of power to honestly consider how often we categorize anyone or any part of creation as "other." How often do we use our power to uphold those we regard as "us" and how often are we using it to hurt those we regard as "other"? More importantly, how often do we use the power we have to help or support those who we regard as "other"?

Old Turtle and the Broken Truth tells us that before the people could really start to be one people—we might say, to love others the way that God loves us-- they needed to listen closely to all the little truths of the world. We might say that they needed to listen to the way the Holy Spirit speaks little truths through breezes, the rivers, and the flowers. I would add that we need to truly humble ourselves enough to listen to the truths that other people speak, particularly the people who we regard as different from us. Paul asks us to "value others above ourselves." Part of doing this is finding a way to really listen and take seriously the truths that others speak to us, and to do that, we need to stop thinking of them as "other" at all.

As the story tells us, being able to really listen takes imagination and curiosity. It comes from a desire to really understand why people think and act the way that they do, and why we are divided. It comes from humility, and a willingness to wonder if my way might be wrong or at least not right all by itself. What if my way, my truth, is somehow incomplete? What if I am living my life entirely based on a broken truth? And what if the truth of the other, of the different one, could complete my truth?

What Paul reminds the Phillipians and what Douglas Wood reminds his readers is that we are one people. More importantly, a whole truth that unites us, and that should guide us was given to all of creation: We are loved, and so are they. Thanks be to God.