

Going Deep to Discover and Recover our Communion
based on Luke 17:1-6, David Jahnke, 10/2/16

Today's passage has Jesus calling his disciples his little ones. The disciples often remind me of children doing the sibling rivalry thing. Their and our unnecessary quibbling and pride pain each other and the Lord. Jesus warned them about this but both before and after the warnings, he acknowledges that stumbling blocks will come. The same behaviors we see among our children continue into adulthood. Children have to deal with adults fighting just as we have to deal with theirs. And they learn to normalize it.

I heard a wonderful piece on NPR about two brothers who have been basically estranged for more than 20 years. One of their sons called them up and suggested that it was time for them to get together again. It was Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, so he figured it was a good time to talk about forgiveness and suggest a reunion.

The brothers were both hesitant but they were willing to meet if the other said he wanted to. They small-talked for a day and a half, mostly side-stepping their son and nephew's pushing them deeper. But they eventually got to the heart of the issue which was their father abusing their mother; her leaving and her choosing to take with her the elder son during that first year of separation. The younger was always hurt by this. But through their going deeper, it became clear that she did this not because she loved the elder more but because she needed to protect him from the father who was much crueler to him.

This was how the story ended and you can read along in the insert if you'd like:

Jonathan Goldstein

So if you feel like you were compelled to see each other now, because you knew that it's a now-or-never thing, then it means that it was important to you both, right, to see each other?

Sheldon Goldstein

You want to take that?

Buzz Goldstein

Sure.

Sheldon Goldstein

Go ahead.

Buzz Goldstein

It's an easy answer, yes. Yes, because we're not getting any younger. What's down the road? I'm 80, he's 85. I mean, because there was a lot of water under the bridge, and we want to close that bridge now. I want to feel easy now. I want to say, now he's going to be 86, I want to call him on his birthday and say happy birthday to him now. I'm going to stand in any [BLEEP] ceremonies anymore.

Jonathan Goldstein

As my father speaks, as per his brother's example, dropping f-bombs like he's in it Guy Ritchie film, Sheldon keeps his arms crossed and his eyes shut tight. He's quiet for several seconds. And then he reaches out to pet his cat.

Sheldon Goldstein

Should I leave you the cat in my will if anything happens?

Buzz Goldstein

If anything happens, I'll take care of the cat.

Sheldon Goldstein

[LAUGHS]

Buzz Goldstein

I'll take care of the cat. I'm happy I came to see you. That I am.

Sheldon Goldstein

I'm happy you came. That's good, very good.

[STREET TRAFFIC]

Well, if you want to buy a house, that one is for sale over there.

Jonathan Goldstein

When it's time to leave, Sheldon walks us outside. But before we get into the rental, he points across the lawn to his neighbor's house. He tells my father that it's for sale. And then he tells him the asking price. And my father says, that doesn't sound bad at all. And Sheldon says that, what, with Canada being so bloody cold, my father should consider moving to Florida. And my father says, maybe he will.

Buzz Goldstein

All right, you take care of yourself.

Sheldon Goldstein

Water under the bridge.

Buzz Goldstein

Take care of yourself. You hear?

Sheldon Goldstein

Take care. You too. Safe trip, both of you's. Thank you. Thank you.

Buzz Goldstein

We'll speak. We'll speak.

Jonathan Goldstein

They don't get too emotional. They don't even hug goodbye. They just shake hands. And with that, it feels like Buzz has forgiven Sheldon, and Sheldon has forgiven Buzz.

Gps

Turn right on Northwest Bedford Drive.

Buzz Goldstein

Oh my god, I feel so different now. You know that? I feel different, Jonny. I just feel so different. This has taken a lot off my shoulders. You know?

I love how this son brought them together to go deeper; how they came to understand each other more, forgive each other. And the weight of many estranged and broken years was lifted.

So we brothers and sisters need to keep going deeper with each other. The word for this in the New Testament is *Koininia*-- fellowship, communion. It refers to our shared life and unity. It says we are one despite brokenness so we have to press forward through the pain we cause each other, trusting in our unity.

Quick sidenote-- the general assembly of our denomination approved the Belhar Confession this summer which was written in South Africa during the 1980s during apartheid. It presses the church forward in making visible our unity through justice, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Many of the principles laid out were put into practice through truth and reconciliation commission that helped to bring unity to South Africa.

So this is our communion on a large stage. But our communion is most evident and essential in our families. They are the ones with whom we share life and all of the deepest bonds of love and loyalty. But they are also the ones with whom we have shared the most sin. And the way we overcome this is by trusting in our one-ness and the deep bonds of love and loyalty; and looking each other in the eyes with grace and love; letting each other know time and again what we appreciate about them and also being willing to say, "I regret what I did and the way things are. I want to change and I want things to change." What makes this possible is Christ's laws of forgiveness and love. When we know that love and mercy are unconditional and unwavering, then we can open up to each other.

Most of us are not very good at this. When there are stumbling blocks around that make us fall, we strongly feel our hurt but not so much the others. We believe in and are conscious of the wrong they have done and feel slighted by their judgment of what we have done.

And far too often the stumbling blocks themselves are not sins but little things that hurt feelings. Again, that is because there are deeper things going on. So if a loved one is angry or accusatory, the best medicine is to stay calm and quiet and listen and show compassion. When they feel better, you may need to go back and try to help them go deeper to address the true source of pain. And if you yourself get regularly saddened or angered by others who have not at that time sinned-- then you need to go deeper through prayer and maybe counseling. Because the Spirit of Jesus is the best mediator and medicine, we may need another person's counsel as well.

I spoke to someone recently who was talking about finally getting marriage counseling after being married for 25 years. And since they have done this in a spirit of openness, they have learned so much about themselves and each other and their marriage has begun to blossom because of this time to explore the deeper things.

But even with prayer and good counsel, people are so slow to change. Jesus knew this which is why he said we have to keep turning to and forgiving each other up to seven times a day. This requires incredible strength. And the disciples response is classic. "Lord, increase our faith!!" Put into modern terms, I think they are saying, "Dude, are you for real?" They were already aware that the same brokenness in the home was also present in their fellowship. They did not want to put up with broken people and their weaknesses.

So Jesus rebuked them for their own relative weakness, saying that if they had faith the size of a tiny mustard seed, they would be doing miracles every day. Uproot any trees lately by the power of your thought? How humbling is that for the quote-unquote "faithful" and "strong."

I hope that some of you have been kind of furrowing your brow-- questioning me because everyone in your family is basically strong and healthy emotionally and spiritually. Jesus says to you, "I am glad you have received my Spirit! Now get out there and start helping others go deeper into my love! Many of my weak little ones out there need the strength and wisdom and mercy you can provide. And I send you out in the Spirit of strength beyond your imagining!"

A couple of weeks ago I gave a gentleman whom I have been helping out \$15 to get a haircut. I had a message on my phone a couple of days ago in which he confessed to not spending the \$15 on a haircut. He was so sorry and said he would pay me back.

This tugged at my heart and sent shivers up and down my spine. This gentleman has so little. He is developmentally disabled; no money; little support. And yet he found the strength to turn back to me and confess his wrong, not knowing of course how I would respond.

So if someone as disadvantaged as him and with so much to lose by confessing; if he can dig deep and repent, we who have so many blessings can certainly do the same. I charge you to dig deep in yourself regarding personal struggles; dig deep with your loved ones in search of understanding, mercy and peace. And help those who struggle to know and feel these great things on the surface of life; help them to dig deep and find them. When we dig deep in study, prayer, fellowship and service, we can uproot evil and toss it into the sea and then we can all abide in the goodness that remains.

Let's now return the divine gifts of our lives and labor to the Lord...