

“Honor Oneself”

Psalm 139: 13-16; Matthew 11: 28-30

This week, we are reflecting on the third sacred truth from the Tree of Life: the Truth which calls us to honor oneself. If we remember from last week’s conversation, we shared that the word honor comes from the same Greek word for price, meaning when we say we are to honor oneself, we are called to recognize our inherent worth. We are invited to celebrate who we are as Beloved Children of God. In honoring ourselves, we are claiming and naming that, as individuals, we are precious in God’s sight.

I’ll admit that for me, this is easier said than done. Sure I try to watch what I eat and I exercise a little, but I’m not sure I really honor myself all that well because more often than not, I am my own worst critic. And I know that I am not alone in this. We live in a world where the suicide rates continue to rise, and not just in teenagers anymore. Suicide rates are increasing in all ages, in all classes, in all genders, in all ethnicities. It is no longer just a teenager issue. We also live in a world where we numb the pain with drugs, alcohol, food, and work, or any combination of all of the above. We also live in a world plastic surgery is no longer just for the rich and famous. A little nip here and a little tuck there, and all of us can be perfect or at least that’s what we are promised. We live in a world that does

not know how to honor ourselves beyond trophies, promotions, and beating all others just so that we can be number one. There are many reasons for this but I think the main one is simply this. Taking care of ourselves is not perceived as a strength by our wider culture. It is not perceived as a needed element to nourish our bodies and spirits, like water, food and air is. For example, usually if anyone just mentions needing a mental health day or that someone is trying to practice self-care, the immediate response given is: what's wrong with you? Rather than affirming that person's ability to name what they need to be healthy, instead we find fault with their actions, assuming that they are lazy, or that they would be too much of a risk because of their problems, so we tell ourselves why even bother engaging them in relationship, so we say that they are not worth our time.

Brene` Brown gives this fascinating TED talk. She shares, that there is evidence to support the realization that we are the most in-debt ... obese ... addicted and medicated adult cohort in U.S. history. She goes on to say that [Our culture values production. Our culture values business and stress. Our culture values tiredness...because it assumes that if we are tired, if we are haggard, if we are burned out, if we are miserable then we must be doing something right. And in turn, we assume that by allowing ourselves to be treated as cogs in a big machine, you know cogs which are easily replaceable when broken, cogs which are easily disposable when they are not needed anymore, cogs which are only valued for

what they can do, we assume that being cogs in big machines is what our true purpose as individuals really is.]

But she clarifies, “That's not our purpose. That’s not our job in life. No, our job is to look at our children, [to look at each other, to even look at ourselves] and say, "You know what? You're imperfect, and you're wired for struggle, but you are worthy of love and belonging." That's our job. [She says] show me a generation of kids raised like that, a generation of kids who know that they are worthy of love, a generation of kids who know that they are enough, a generation of kids who know that they belong, show me a generation of kids like that and we'll end the problems that we see today” and the reason for this is...we can’t have compassion for others unless we have compassion for ourselves first”.

Let me say that again: We can’t have compassion for others unless we have compassion for ourselves first. In faith terms, we say that this way: As disciples of Christ, we are called to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

This third sacred truth calls us to honor ourselves, not by culture’s standards but by claiming our inherent God-given grace filled worthiness and value as the Truth which shapes us, as the Truth which guides us. We honor ourselves by living out this Truth’s life giving power each and every day. It starts by offering ourselves the same grace, and compassion which we so readily show others. It

starts by welcoming each day with joy and gratitude. Honoring ourselves starts by simply saying to ourselves each moment of every day, you are loved more than you will ever know and you are enough.

Think how revolutionary something like this would be, could be. Think of the ripple effects which would spread across our communities, across our nation...all because we not only look at others as created in the image of God but we embrace this realization for ourselves as well.

Please let me clarify something....when this sacred Truth calls us to honor ourselves, it is not a call to selfishness. Selfishness is putting our wants over the needs of others. Self-respect is putting our needs over the wants of others. One is disregarding others. One is taking care of ourselves. The third Sacred Truth calls us to take of our bodies and our spirits.

It is humbling and heart-breaking to think that there are people in our community, in our nation, in our lives, people who we encounter every day who have never heard this life giving, life affirming news. But I know it to be true. I have had conversations with people who seem to have it all together only to find out that they are trying to keep up the illusion of perfection and when it all falls apart, because invariably it always does, there is nothing to sustain them for the journey ahead.

I think that is why the service for remembering our baptisms is so powerful and meaningful. I have the honor of reminding each one of you that you are a Beloved Child of God and then...and then...someone takes my hands and does the same for me. It is always my hope that this knowledge of who we are and whose we are takes root in our hearts, takes root in our bodies, takes root in our spirits so that when we are go out in the world and are bombarded with negativity about our person, we will remember this wisdom, this spark of God's light which dwells in each of us, and we will let our light shine rather than buying into the false narrative of our unworthiness, the false narrative of us never being enough. It is my hope that we always remember our true narrative of who we are and whose we are rather than buying into the false narrative of our lack, a narrative which this world tries to tell us, a narrative which this world tries to sell us every single day.

Our faith narrative tells us loud and clear that God is with us, that God knows us, that even before we were born, God knew us and loved us. As the psalmist says on multiple occasions, this knowledge is too wonderful for us...to even think that the God who created the heavens, who brought the mountains into being, would think that God's creation was incomplete without me, with you, without us.

Psalm 139 tells us that we are worthy, that we are enough. It tells us that because this beautiful life giving knowledge is held within our DNA, the

knowledge of how we are and whose we are, because this life giving knowledge is held within our DNA, we can let go of who we think we should be and simply embrace who we are, Beloved Children of God, Named and Claimed and loved more than we can ever imagine. By honoring ourselves, we can have the courage and the strength to let go of the temptation to be a persona, and simply be the person God created and calls us to be.

Which brings me to our second text today.... I invite you to hear these words. “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

For the third week in a row, I am standing up here saying I don't have all the answers and that I hope we all do as I say rather than what I do when it comes to self-care and honoring ourselves. Because as I said before, I am far from perfect when it comes to this sacred truth. However, I may not have all the answers but it seems to me, this text from Matthew is a good starting point. It tells us all we need to know about incorporating this sacred wisdom from the Tree of Life, incorporating this wisdom of honoring ourselves into our lives.

It reminds us that once again, we are never alone on this journey of life, and that when it all becomes too much, we can always turn to the presence of God and find rest and renewal. We can find sanctuary from the pressures to be perfect. We can find sanctuary from the pressures of being a persona rather than a person. This text from Matthew reminds us that we never carry our worries, our troubles, or our fears alone. Which for me is the first step to honoring ourselves....having the courage to admit that we are vulnerable and yet still having the strength to open ourselves up to loving with our whole hearts. Which leads us to leaning into joy, and sharing gratitude. Which finally leads us to believing always that we are enough.

Jesus tells his disciples to Come and lay your burdens down and simply be. What a gift...an invitation to come away and simply find rest and renewal, an invitation that our Lord and Savior could extend.

Again it is humbling to think how much we are loved by our God that sometimes we just can't take it all in. And the amazing thing is that we have the promise given to us that we don't have to be perfect. We don't have to get it right every single time. Becoming the person God created us to be is a process that begins with honoring ourselves. And if we need a little help remembering this, we can always just look to Jesus' example. After all, he understood that you can't have compassion for others until you have compassion for yourself first. That's why he

took time away from the crowds to rest and renew. That's why he showed us the benefits of a restorative nap during the storms of life. That's why he showed us how gathering around the table with a group of friends for food and fellowship could restore our souls. So let's face it...despite what the world may say, we know that by embracing the call to honor ourselves, we are simply following Jesus' example and becoming the people that God created and calls us to be. May it be so. Amen.