

When my grandmother passed away, it was found
with the formal instructions of her will
a letter she wrote to her children.
It was a long time ago, and yet I remember this letter.
I remember it, strangely
because there was nothing outstanding to it.
No uncovering of well-kept secrets, no map to a hidden treasure dug into the ground,
not even one last recommendation
on how her children could take care of the real estate or flourish the family business.
It was a simple letter that in plain words basically told my mother and her siblings
To love one another and to stay united.
Because, my grandmother said in the letter, she loved them, all of them
I guess even more so since she had for thirty years in her chest the terrible pain of having lost
one of them
And so, you see, she just wanted them to be family.

**7th Sunday in Easter,
May 8, 2016
Acts 16:16-34
John 17:20-26
The Rev Fanny Belanger**

Well, it touches me so much that today in his prayer,
a prayer he said right before his own death,
Jesus has the heart of a mother.
This is the wonder of spirituality
that
you don't have to be able or willing to make babies
to be a mother
You *just* (so to speak) need unconditional love
love unasked for, love undeserved, love without boundaries.
I find it really sad when some teach that Jesus condemned the world
when actually
Jesus does not want to lose any of his children,
as a mother could be for ever broken by such a grief.
And so Jesus asks his disciples to carry on his message of love to the ends of the earth
until the end of the world
Because we all need to know, because
we are all his children
And maybe, maybe,
as a mother sometimes secretly loves a little more the one who is the furthest away,
the one who is gone,
I wonder if Jesus, far from condemning them
does not love even more (was it possible to love more)
the ones who don't know him.

In this short text of John, we hear Jesus longing for reconciliation
Longing to bring all men and women into his embrace.
I don't think that wishing them to "be one", he wishes for his people to
be the same in all things
I think it's about being together is all.
And so this is Jesus' will, Jesus' last will, his ultimate letter to his friends
*Now that you know how much I have loved you
Bring back together, to me and to the Father
a world that is cut off and far away.*

Last week in our forum, Carter Echols came to speak to us about how we can become these disciples of the word and of the love in a mission field where the hearts are far away, despondent, distressed or just distracted.

And I guess what Carter said to us was just

You don't have to feel like you teach a lesson when you preach the Gospel

Because it all comes down to the gift and the joy,

As the first disciples, you only have to share the happiness of knowing you've been loved.

Sharing the happiness of knowing you've been loved - Let's think about it for a moment.

Maybe you remember from school this old myth, the best well-known myth in the history of thought.

Plato used to compare this world we live in

to a cave

where people are chained, facing a wall, and behind their backs is burning a giant fire and so

all the prisoners can see is shadows

shadows they mistake for reality, the things themselves.

But what happens is that one day one of the prisoners

is set free,

and so not only does he turn around, sees the fire,

but he gets outside, looks at the sun for the first time and finds there the source of all life,

the truth nobody knows.

We can only imagine what it would look like

to see the world outside from the first time

with texture, relief and colors

smell the flowers, touch the trees

and how we would die to lie in the grass and get drunk with the light and the beauty

but also, in the meantime,

how badly we would want to go back to the cave

just to tell the inhabitants of the earth under our feet everything we have seen.

Well, I think it's exactly what should happen when you start to know God

(and actually Plato was indeed talking about God)

Maybe telling the world about your faith is not about lecturing people, trying to rescue their souls

or even giving them a good moral example.

Maybe telling the world about our faith is just about wanting people to be happy

as you are happy

Because not only you saw the fire, but you saw the sun

and you found the source of all life.

And it's not that you are smarter or holier than anybody else

it's just that

there was some kind of breach of security

in your prison

somebody removed your chains while we were sleeping.

Or maybe like Paul and Silas,

it was an earthquake that opened the gates for you

In any case, in your life, suddenly or quietly, you came to realize how much God has loved us.

And maybe it was just a day out and then

you were caught back into your cave of your daily routine and someday you almost forget about it,

but still, you know you saw something others still cannot see.

*Righteous Father, the world has not known thee
but I have known thee
Joy, joy, joy tears of joy, I do not separate myself from thee.*

These words from our Gospel
were found sewed inside the clothes of the writer and mathematician Blaise Pascal
after his passing away.

The text is called "The Memorial"

Because indeed, it's a remembrance of *a night of fire*

A night when Pascal felt his chains drop down, a night when he turned around

From the walls of his arrogance and the shadows of his certainties

(so said he)

A night when he met God – Not the abstract God, but a God of love.

The God of Jesus-Christ.

A God, a light, a truth, nobody can find if it's not revealed to him.

Because the thing is: this blindness about God is the blindness of all

It's the prison of our own humanity.

God seems to be nowhere to be found, we are cut off, separated, lonely,

When everything is meant to work together since the big bang

God, nature, human beings,

We have lost sight of our fundamental unity.

We feel estranged, on our own, facing a wall, being afraid of a few shadows we mistake for reality.

And so don't we act surprised that so many don't believe in God, it's just impossible

if you haven't been given the eyes to see.

if you haven't been set free.

In his story, Plato never explained by what miracle a prisoner would be released,

Who will be the first

to untie the chains so that he would

walk outside see the sun and then come back again to

tell everybody about it.

Well it was a very long time ago when Plato wrote this text

but now we know who the *first born* is,

Don't we?

Being set free is not something we can do on our own, no matter how hard we think about it.

We need a breach in security, a breach in certainty.

We need a way

we need somebody to remove the chains for us.

We need God to come to us

because we cannot go to him.

And this is why faith can never be

a claim, a slogan, an ideology,

not even a philosophy or even a theology.

Faith is an experience of Christ who sets us free

And when Christ sets us free

we are free to go into the world to be

witnesses to the light we have seen.

This light that shines through the thicker darkness, as John likes to say it.

That Faith is an experience of liberation,
I think we can see it very clearly in the book of Acts today.
If you remember Paul's letters, it's not the first time he is bothered by
charismatic preachers.
Paul today is not happy with the girl prophetizing, but I think it's mainly because
her masters are just making money out of her gift.
She proclaims a way of salvation,
when ironically she is a slave herself, and a slave to herself as long as she keeps prophetizing.
Well, you cannot be a child when you're a slave,
at least spiritually.

And this is why Paul sets the girl free,
free from her demons and consequently from her masters.
Paul knows that to proclaim Jesus-Christ, it can't be just words,
True proclamation comes when
You bring in yourself a sign of salvation, of liberation, of this goodness and of this joy
you've been given.

Shouting verses can be a demon,
religion for money is a perversion.
Yes, but religion for the sake of religion is not any better.
Religion is dead practice, if it does not lead us to make changes
If it does not change ourselves and then
change the world around us.

There is no quiet Christian. It does not exist.
Because Christians, in any way of life, must be witnesses.
Passionate for God, passionate for joy and for justice, for tolerance and for truth.
It's not about converting people – it's not about force-feeding a religion.
It's about bringing to others what Jesus brought to us.
Think of all the things your faith does for you, and then do them for
your closest ones and to the farthest away.
In Acts, Paul and Silas' faith does not only open the gates of the prison as it triggers an earthquake,
but it turns around the jailer himself (The jailer himself has to be set free)
Paul and Silas do not want salvation only for themselves, only for their friends,
They want salvation even for their enemies.
Because they know that this is Christ's last letter, this is Christ's ultimate will
not to lose any one of us.

As a mother loves her child from the very beginning,
God loved Christ before the foundation of our world,
And Christ loved us at the foundation of our world, too.
Maybe you remember your own night of fire, when you started to experience this love,
when God happened for you,
and how everything started to change for you.
But whatever are our stories of liberation,
In the night of the world, we need to witness it in words and actions.
And so the question is not so much anymore: How did we experience the earthquake than
How can we be an earthquake?

How can we be an earthquake? Amen.