

YEARNINGS

Embracing the Sacred Messiness of Life

Bring It on Jack

A sermon offered by the Rev. Dr. Michael D. Castle
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Cross Creek Community Church, United Church of Christ
Dayton, Ohio

Psalms 51:1-17

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment. Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me. You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be purer than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance. O God, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a troubled spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

***“You desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart”***

Psalm 51:6

“When you’ve got an answer, it’s time to find better questions.” So begins Rabbi Kula’s book, YEARNINGS: EMBRACING THE SACRED MESSINESS OF LIFE.

Contrary to popular belief, seeking truth, yearning for truth is never about arrival. It’s never about finding a final destination. As in, “I’ve found the truth,” now I can quit searching. As in, “I’ve got it now,” as if the truth were something that can be bought or sold or put in a box. The discovery of truth only leads us to more questions and the pursuit of more truths. So wisdom suggests that we hold our truths lightly in order to make room for new truths to emerge.

For sure, there is joy in the discovery of truth. When breakthroughs in science or a new cure in medicine are announced, it is cause for rejoicing. When love is found and experienced passionately and your world goes to spinning, it is indeed a wonderful and beautiful thing. New spiritual insights and a fresh awareness of God’s presence can give you holy goose bumps. Yes, finding truth is a good thing! Do enjoy and relish those moments of discovery and insight. But don’t hold them too tightly. To hold on to a truth as the final or only answer leads to arrogance and dead ends, leads to the stifling of creativity and growth.

Rabbi Kula suggests, instead of teaching absolute truth, we need to learn

to dance with dualities and contradictions: Life and Death; Hate and Love; Right and Wrong; Sorrow and Joy. There is no perfect balance nor final solutions; no end to the highs and lows, to the darkness and the light. And thank God, because there’s so much richness, so much dimension, in those tensions and anxieties; so many opportunities to deepen our understanding.

The Psalmist says that God yearns for “truth in the inward being.” What truths are you holding there? What truths are you yearning for there...in your inward being? So often the truths we hold *there* are less than positive or life affirming. So often the truths we cling to are negative and life-diminishing. Is it your truth that you see yourself through the lens of sinner...that because of your poor decision making and actions, you see yourself as a no good, shameful, unworthy, undeserving human being?

Is it your truth that you are a loser? You have tried and tried again, but you can only name failure and see yourself as such?

Is it your truth that your life or the life of the world is going to hell in hand basket; that all seems lost and despair reigns?

Is it your truth that your grief is overwhelming and never ending?

Is it your truth that God is dead, or at best silent, and that the dark night of your soul is the final answer?

What are the truths that you bring with *you* to worship tonight?

I hope you will hold those lightly enough to allow some new truths to emerge. I hope you will not take those truths too seriously so that they turn into hardened certainty. On this Ash Wednesday, as we enter into the season of Lent, this great season for spiritual reflection and life discernment, I am hoping that you will allow the truths you hold to burn brightly...and long enough...*to turn to ash*. Maybe then...in the ashes...some new truths can break through and surprise.

Is it your truth that you are a no good, rotten sinner? I hope you will let that truth turn to ash and from the ashes of that awareness you will discover you are forgiven, loved, deserving and worthy...and from the discovery of *that* truth see what other truths may emerge.

Is it your truth that you are a failure? I hope you will let that truth turn to ash once and for all, and from that awareness you will discover new possibilities and potentialities and that trying and failing may just be a part of the bumpy road to success.

Is it your truth that life is despairing and you feel lost and your grief is overwhelming? I hope you will let that truth turn to ash and from the ashes of that awareness you will discover some shoots of joy and hope and a sense of being found.

Is it your truth that God is dead, or at best silent? I hope you will let that truth turn to ash and from the ashes of that awareness you will discover that the world and your life is infused with the sacred, pulsing, dancing presence of God.

Rabbi Kula's encourages us to be

sacred skeptics. Many think skepticism is paralyzing, hopeless, cynical; but it's the opposite. Skepticism inspires us to know more. Skepticism can be revelatory. When we both hold and question our truths we become lifelong learners rather than absolute knowers—as well as more interesting and much easier people to be with. Not seduced by certainty, we can be open to the truth.”

We started this service with a movie clip from A FEW GOOD MEN. It is obvious that I wanted us to watch it for that famous line by Jack Nicholson. When I handed the movie to the store clerk at Hollywood Video, the first thing she did was quote that line: “You can't handle the truth.”

On this Ash Wednesday, with the words of the Psalmist ringing in our ears that God desires *truth* in our inward beings,” I wan to say, “Bring it on Jack. Bring it on!” Bring on the truth. We can handle it. We must! We must if any new truths are going to break free. We must yearn for truth...if we are to travel “the paths of resurrection.”

Amen.