

Easter 6A - 2020

When Doubt Sets In

Years ago I read something rather odd: "The reason mountain climbers are tied together is to keep the sane ones from going home." Whoever said that was playing with us a bit, for we know mountain climbers are tied together to keep from getting lost or going over a cliff. But there's another piece of truth here. When things get tough up on the mountain, when fear sets in, many a climber is tempted to say, "This is crazy! I'm going home".

The life of faith can be like that—doubts set in, despair overwhelms us, and the whole notion of believing in God seems crazy. Jesus knew his disciples would have days like that. So he told them we're tied together like branches on the vine—or like climbers tied to the rope—tied together by the Spirit, to trust in one who is always more than we can understand, to keep us moving ahead on the journey of faith, to encourage us when believing seems absurd. **"I will not leave you orphaned," said Jesus. "I am coming to you."** (by Barbara K. Lundblad from *I Will Not Leave You Orphaned*)

That command—love and forgive your enemies—more than any creedal formula or other moral issue, is the litmus-test for Christian discipleship. We can ardently believe in and defend every item in the creed and fight passionately for justice in all its dimensions, but the real test of whether or not we are followers of Jesus is the capacity or non-capacity to forgive an enemy, to remain warm and loving towards someone who is not warm and loving to us.

We shouldn't delude ourselves on this. It is easy to rationalize this away and, if we do, no doubt there will be more than enough false friends around who will furnish us with both theological and psychological arguments that will justify us in not loving our enemies. But the gospel is uncompromising: We are loving not on the basis of how we respond to those who love us, but on the basis of how we respond to those who hate us, and are cold, hostile, and murderous toward us.

That's the hard, non-negotiable truth underlying Jesus' command to love, and when we are honest, we have to admit that we are still a long way from measuring up to that.

What shatters our illusion of love is the presence in our lives of people who hate us. They're the test. It's here where we have to measure up: if we can love them, we're real lovers, if we can't, we're still under a self-serving illusion. (by Fr. Ron Rolheiser)

God Surprises the Hopeless

When Christopher Columbus was sailing to the new world his hired sailors were threatening mutiny. The voyage was long and hard and there was no land in sight for weeks. One day Columbus saw an encouraging sign. Floating on the ocean swells was a small tree branch. The branches' leaves were green, indicating that land could not be far away. The green branch gave the sailors enthusiasm and a renewed hope. Soon after its discovery, land was sighted from the sailor in the crow's nest.

When all seems hopeless God has a way of surprising us and being present, even in the loneliest places. It is not God who is absent but we who have ceased to believe in a God who loves us more than we love ourselves. (by Keith Wagner from *Who Said Loving Others Was Easy?*)