

Trinity Sunday (June 7, 2020)
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The Jewish sages tell a story about a young man who visited his rabbi one day. The young man was struggling with a problem in his life. As he poured out his heart, the rabbi listened with patience and compassion.

Then the rabbi offered very wise spiritual advice. The young man listened to every word from the wise rabbi, and became so overwhelmed with gratitude and emotion that, at last, the young man blurted out, “Rabbi, you are so wise. Thank you so much. Rabbi, I love you!”

The Rabbi was both touched and amused by the young man’s sincerity, so he gently said to the young man, “So, you say that you love me? Tell me, my son – what causes me pain? What hurts me?”

Perplexed, the young man said, “But rabbi, how can I know what hurts you. Nevertheless, I love you dearly!”

And the rabbi said, “My son, if you don’t know what hurts me, you cannot say you love me.”

When I first heard that story, I was a much younger man. And while I thought it was amusing, I don’t think I truly believed the lesson it was trying to impart.

When I was much younger, I thought that love was a reality focused primarily on joy, smiles, energy, excitement, passion, celebrations, happiness. The people who loved me made me happy. Isn’t love about happiness?

And then I grew up. And I began to realize how much I treasure the people in my life who know me well enough that they know what is broken in me.

They don’t have to ask, but they can tell when I am down. The people who love me know my story clearly enough that they can anticipate what might cause me pain. They can sense when I am confused or lost. The people who love me know how I am vulnerable. The people who love me know what hurts me.

Of course, in the end, the one who loves me perfectly is God. And God knows me better than I know myself. God knows what hurts me. And God has already done what was necessary to heal my hurts. He sent his son, Jesus, with words and actions that bring healing, hope, life.

John's Gospel says it best on this Trinity Sunday: God so loved the world – God so loved US – that he sent his only son, not condemn the world, but to save it. To save us from all that hurts us. Even sin. Even death.

God loves us. And in another place in the Gospel we are reminded that we are to love God in return, with our whole heart, and mind, and strength.

Well, then, if I am called to love God, then isn't it true that I am called to know what hurts God, what breaks God's heart?

Now you may say, "Isn't it presumptuous for someone to say that they know what hurts God?" But, to them I would say: God has already *told us* what breaks his heart. All we have to do is read the Scriptures.

The prophets tell us. What brings heartbreak to the God whom we love?

Injustice. Greed. A self-centered life. Just read the prophets. They tell us.

What breaks God's heart?

When his children *use* each other, ignore each other's need or pain, trample on each other's rights or dignity. Just read the prophets. They tell us.

What breaks God's heart?

When his children make something else the idol that they serve. When his children lie, covet, steal, disrespect their parents. When his children kill.

What breaks God's heart? When one of his children takes the life of another child of God – whether that's on the streets of Minneapolis, in a riot in Los Angeles, in an abortion clinic near Parham Road, in a war of aggression.

God has already told us – through the prophets - what breaks his heart, what hurts him. If we love God - as the Scriptures command us to do – aren't we called to KNOW what hurts God and become active in seeking ways to end those behaviors by God's own children?

After all, in today's second reading Saint Paul calls us to a life in which our love overflows in service to our neighbor. He calls us to rejoice. And then he says: "Mend your ways. Encourage one another. Agree with each other. Live in peace."

Given all that we've experienced in recent weeks, aren't those very timely words?

The other night I was speaking with a brother priest about racism, violence, poverty, injustice. This priest has been, in many ways, one of the men I look up to in regard to the way that preaches about racism and seeks to confront it through his actions.

But he said something to me the other night that made me pay attention. He said that, in the days ahead, he has scheduled a series of conversations with African American members of his parish. He said that as a Caucasian American, he is certain of one thing: he does NOT know what it is like to be black in America. And rather than making a variety of assumptions, he wants to listen.

And then my brother priest said, "After all, listening is an act of love."

God so loved the world. God listens to the heartbroken cries of this world. Listening is an act of love. So God listens, when oppressed people cry out for justice. God listens to those frustrated by hate and hurt. God listens to the isolated senior citizen who is freighted by a virus. God listens to the wife of a police officer, who prays as her husband leaves the house for another dangerous shift on city streets. Listening is an act of love. God listens. Because God loves.

And the God who IS love has called us to create communities of love. After all, that is what the Holy Trinity is – a community of loving relationships, right in the heart of God.

Well, we are created in God's image. Which means that we are called to create and

work for and live in communities of love.

The Bible says, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Which means - listen. Listen deeply enough to learn. Listen to learn what hurts one another. No assumptions.

Over the next few days, I am trying to follow the lead of my brother priest. I am reaching out to a number of people here in our parish: African Americans, Immigrants, people whose first language is not English, gay and lesbian people. I need to listen. I need to learn. I want to love enough to know what hurts other.

We all know that these kinds of conversations are not easy at times. But my father taught me that anything worth doing will probably be hard. Listening is an act of love.

So I must turn to the one who shows us what love is. I must constantly stay rooted in the example of God in Christ. He loves us so much that he knows what hurts us. If we are called to love our neighbor, then we are called to be a listening people.

Love and listen long enough to learn what hurts you. Only then can I say that I love you, in Jesus’ name.