

St. Benedict's 2.12.2023  
Community and Compassion

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you, Holy one.

When I went to Seminary I lived on campus, and we lived in dormitory-style housing. This was definitely an adjustment for me. After living on my own for a long time moving into a community living situation was a learning experience to say the least. I'd also been working in Higher Education facilitating students in community living so it felt weird being on the other side of things. One of our first tasks was to fill out a community agreement. It was a way for us to expound on the rules that had already been established. It was an exercise that I had been facilitating for years with the students. In that context, it was a way for new students to practice their communication and problem-solving skills. In seminary, it was a way for us to begin the process of getting to know one another and begin laying a foundation for the community support we would need for the challenging work that lay ahead. In many ways similar to the early Christian communities in our text today.

Our readings today provide us with some complex texts to navigate together. As we read through our Gospel text, we might be tempted to miss some of the potential nuances and skip right to how we've always heard or read this text. How we've connected to it before or maybe we've even put it in our that text doesn't really work for me bin. Yet today I want to invite us into a space to hear the text a new and ask the question how is God speaking to us today through this text? What might the spirit be inviting us into that we weren't expecting?

Because there's so much to explore in all of our readings, I would like to focus our energy on our Gospel text today.

Here, we find Jesus delivering a sermon on community ethics related to four basic themes, reconciliation, adultery, divorce, and swearing. It is important to understand that Jesus is not contradicting the laws but deepening or broadening their understanding for those listening.

While laws about murder were already in place as Jesus references, Jesus expands his teaching to include anger and also clarifies that one must be reconciled to one's siblings in the community before coming to worship God. Jesus is making it clear that intention as well as actions matter in community life. One of the nuances to note in this text is that individuals are being asked to take responsibility for their actions and the one who has committed the offense is responsible to

initiate the reconciliation. In these texts, Jesus still locates himself within the law yet expands or reframes the laws with what we see as God's intent or God's will.

As we move on to Jesus' next theme I find Jesus' message about divorce interesting as it expands on the law in a way that seemingly intends to protect the woman or in some way make her equal in this scenario. Expanding the idea of the law and showing us a glimpse of what God's will on earth might look like.

This is the same when we look at Jesus' message about swearing. Again, Jesus isn't going against the law but standing in it and saying you don't actually need all the swearing by God, Jerusalem, or by anything else all you need is for your word to be so honorable that your yes means yes and your no means no and everyone can trust that.

These communal norms were important for the early forming Christian community. It is a way that sets them apart yet gathers them together. While these laws and rules have their own context their teachings about community living are very relevant for our modern times.

I was struck by Jesus' call for reconciliation and how our liturgy is structured with the Peace before the Eucharist. I wonder how many of us utilize that time to reconcile with those we may have wronged even if it's to say I'm sorry are you open to chatting over coffee? Sometimes the wound is deeper or more complex and may need deeper discernment. Communities and people are complex after all and I want to make sure I acknowledge that. The key is how we continue to grow together.

Our Gospel text today is calling us to lean into those complexities. To try and understand ourselves better in a communal context. To understand that it isn't simply our actions that matter but our intentions as well. That we must take care of the vulnerable among us as God has called us to do. To examine ourselves to ensure that we are ready to be transformed by the word God shares with us.

In seminary, I lived with people who challenged me in lots of ways. This was a real challenge at first as I tried to find my place within the community but once we started to work with each other in new ways and let each other transform one another it started to come together.

And as we faced challenges together those foundations would end up seeing us through.

Our text today reminds me of the importance of community and how Jesus calls us not only to stand in that which we know but also to utilize our collective imagination and prayer to discern how God is calling us to expand those understandings. Remembering that it's not only our

actions but our intentions that we must pay attention to and that this Christian community is the foundation of the work we do and the springboard for the work we take out into the world.

My prayer for us all is that we find strength in our community together and remember the good news of God's love as we go out into the world. Amen