

Emmanuel Church
October 29, 2017
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May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and redeemer. Amen.

It's Moses and Jesus this morning.

First, Moses:

*and the LORD showed him the whole land: Gilead as far as Dan...
The LORD said to him, "This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants'; I've let you see it with your eyes, but you won't cross over there." Then Moses, the servant of the LORD, died there in the land of Moab.*
[Deuteronomy 34:1-12]

And then, Jesus:

*"Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?"
Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.'
This is the greatest and first commandment.
And a second is **like it**: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'
[Matthew 22:34-46]*

So, Moses was given a glimpse from that mountain. "I will let you see it with your eyes."

And then Jesus told us what it looks like – a clearer glimpse - how people can behave when they really "get it." The holy land, or the Kingdom of God, or both?

OK, here's a more **recent**, little glimpse:

My friend went to Trader Joe's at 5:30 one evening. She knew, Friday night was about the stupidest time possible to go, but she went anyway. By 5:45 she was in line – not the first – not the last – in that check out line. She was standing behind an attractive, young couple. Ahead of them was a lady in an electric wheelchair, not especially elderly, buying maybe five full bags of groceries, obviously supplies for several days or weeks. The floor manager was helping her with her debit card because she wasn't able to use the machine. She whispered the code to him, and he tried several times, but the card wouldn't go through. "Do you have maybe a credit card?" he asked. She held up her purse, and he brought out a collection of various cards and papers. Something that looked like a credit card was tried, but no good.

My friend, in line there, was being very patient and charitable [in her mind], hoping for her own sake that one of the lady's cards would turn out to be OK so that she could have her groceries. They searched for other cards. ... but they yielded a variety of equally ineffective attempts. Finally the young man [of the couple] in line ahead of my friend stepped forward and handed *his* card to the checker, who misunderstood and said, "I'll help you in just a moment, sir; sorry for the delay." The young man said under his breath, "No, use this card." The manager caught on and said quietly, "Are you sure you want to do that? It's more than \$130." Both the young man and the young woman nodded. The lady in the

wheelchair didn't realize what was happening in the confusion. So, the store manager pushed her cart outside for her and she waited for her ride. The young couple then bought their groceries and left, quietly.

There are at least a dozen possible stories about the lady in the wheelchair. She could have been a brilliant woman trapped by an incapacitating disease ... or she could have been not up to par mentally. She could have been a con artist hoping for some free groceries, carrying around phony expired cards and riding around in a wheelchair she didn't need. She could have been poor and falling through the cracks of society; she could have had a degenerative disease: she could have been a diamond heiress. It really doesn't matter. What matters is that the young couple did a very kind and generous thing without asking any questions about whether the lady deserved their gift, without seeking any thanks, without needing to appear on a donor list or to get a receipt for their taxes. Maybe they did a good deed for the lady... for certain they did a good deed for the manager, for the checker, for my friend, and for themselves.

My friend is funny. She said that although she is in favor of reasonably-sized families, she found herself hoping that that couple would have lots of children -- maybe a dozen! Imagine children growing up with the daily example of parents who instinctively and instantly make the choice for generosity. Their behavior was the exact opposite of the kind of greedy behavior which seems to be at the heart of so much of our dismal news lately. It was way beyond "kind."

Moses was told :“I will let you see it with your eyes”

And Jesus – “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Our church's generous response in supporting our partner school with that pig roast – over 40 people Shelby reported – and the concert – has been a “glimpse” for me. Did you know that evening raised over \$12,000 to help our Haitian brothers and sisters?

That helped me remember that visits to Haiti have given me lots of glimpses like that; and they have taught me to see things a little more humbly. A few very small stories out of hundreds of similar ones, about tiny moments:

We hike all day to get to a remote school. It's hot. It's dusty. We drink all the water we are carrying. We're still thirsty. A Haitian man sees us and opens green coconuts with a machete so that we can enjoy the water inside them. I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink. Love your neighbor as yourself.

We're in church, and it's hot, and a high school boy travelling with us doesn't feel so good. We take him out to one of the dirt-floored schoolrooms and tell him to lie down until he feels a little better. We go back out to check on him after a little time has passed. One of the Haitian lay leaders is sitting by him, fanning him with a piece of cardboard he has found. I was sick, and you took care of me. Love your neighbor as yourself.

I'm hiking down a high mountain from one of the schools, and a tiny hand slips into mine. It's a little girl who can't be more than about three years old. After staying with me for about a mile, gabbling happily and unintelligibly all the way, she slips her hand out, waves

good-bye, “ovwa” and goes into a mud house by the side of the trail. I was a stranger, and you welcomed me. Even at that age – love your neighbor as yourself.

So, who is ministering to whom? All of my ideas about ministry, charity, hospitality, how to be helpful, how to be church, and how to be a neighbor, have been challenged, informed, or deepened by encounters like these with people who see issues from other perspectives. Meeting with our Haitian partners and friends, trying to get along in each other’s languages, learning to be sensitive about navigating the differences between a culture based almost entirely on relationships and community ... and one based on personal independence with accountability, listening to local experts, wrestling with a seemingly impossible problem, sharing successes and heartbreaking failure – that’s when we can really sense the presence of God among us, blessing our struggles to get it right. Loving neighbor as self. [1]

And here’s a last, for now, powerful glimpse of that *Holy Land*, the Kingdom of God, where “the second is like unto it” things happen -

It was in Louisville, KY, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the crowded shopping district, when I was suddenly overwhelmed with this realization that I loved all those people [around me] ... that they were mine and I was theirs, and that we couldn’t be alien to one another, even though we were total strangers.

It was like waking from a dream of separateness ... the whole *illusion* of a **separate** holy existence is a dream.

This escape from the illusion of difference – of being separate from others - was such a relief and such a joy to me that I almost laughed out loud! Just imagine, I have the immense joy of being [hu]man, a member of a race in which God . . . became incarnate. As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, **now** I realize what we all really are.

And if only **everybody** could realize this! But it can’t be explained. There is no way of telling people that they really are all walking around shining like the sun, all interconnected.

It was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the **depths** of their hearts where even sin or desire or self-knowledge can’t reach ... the core of their reality, the person that each one is - in **God’s** eyes. If only they could all see themselves as they really *are*. If only we could see each other that way all the time. There would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed. No lines, no separation.

So, here’s the Truth - At the center of our being is a point that is untouched by sin and by illusion, a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God, which is never at our disposal, from which God disposes of our lives, which is inaccessible to the fantasies of our own mind or the brutalities of our own will. This little point is the pure glory of God in us ... it’s like a pure diamond, blazing with the invisible light of heaven. It is in everybody, and if we could see it we would see these billions of points of light coming together in the face and blaze of a sun that would make all the darkness and cruelty of life vanish completely. [2]

The command to “Love your neighbor as yourself” would almost be redundant... it would be more than a glimpse, it would be our reality.

And, there it all is, in a few—but stunning— powerful words by Thomas Merton, Trappist monk. Contemplative. Writer.

So, my friends - it's Moses, and Jesus this morning ... and Thomas Merton. Glimpses.

And all the people said "Amen."

Amen

1. Story/observations redacted and borrowed from accounts by Dr. Serena Beeks, Los Angeles
2. Thomas Merton describes the "True Self" in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*