

## Live your truth

Student's sermon by Elise Hanrahan  
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*Discerning and embracing your true self is a holy act. As we grow into ourselves, we become more and more how God made us and intended us to be. But how can we live as our authentic Christian selves in the world? And how can we welcome and embrace those around us as they are – as God made them – without the filters of our own expectations? Striving for this in our homes and communities may bring us experiences of unfamiliar newness, but in those feelings we find proof of our own growth and truth.*

Jer 1:4-5, 17-19

Ps 71:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 15-17

1 Cor 12:31–13:13

Lk 4:21-30

Recognizing a truth that we didn't know before grows us and changes us, and growth and change—no matter how good they are—can be uncomfortable. It can even be scary or painful. Resistance to that is natural; it is normal to be cautious with new things that push us out of our familiar space. But what can we gain as people and as a community when we challenge ourselves in just that way?

### *A Chance for Growth*

As a young adult I was gifted with a chance to grow through uncomfortable truth. I wasn't raised with any religion or spirituality, and before I started becoming Christian as an adult, I looked down on religious people. I didn't know any religious people, but I thought that anyone involved in organized religion was lacking some intelligence or inner will. I even felt sorry for religious people, like they were people stuck in a box. I also felt the same way about people with certain political views that were different from mine. When I moved away from home to study, I was confronted for the first time with students and professors who had very different backgrounds and beliefs than I had, persons I had scorned from a distance

before. And, surprise! They often turned out to be intelligent and wonderfully kind people, people who had seen more of life than I had, or a different kind of life. People I could admire. I had to confront the uncomfortable truth that I had been wrong, closed-minded, and prejudiced before.

About six years later I even converted to Catholicism, so I ended up becoming one of those I had looked down upon before. And as tempting as it might have been, I couldn't see myself as simply 'changing sides'; I couldn't now redirect my pity and look down upon those who *had not* joined an organized religion, or continue to look down on those with different political views. That wouldn't be very Christian of me. Instead I had to recognize that I had carried a lot of pride and self-righteousness before, and that I generally tend to be that way when it comes to ideas. Like most of the challenging aspects of ourselves, it's tied up in something good. I am really passionate about what I feel makes the world a better place; about social justice; about my beliefs. But I needed to exercise less judgment, more humility, and above all, I needed more love for my fellow children of God.

The uncomfortable truth is that it's easy to sit in a bubble, without much contact with people of truly different mindsets and backgrounds. And such circumstances, combined with closed-mindedness, help to create an 'us' and a 'them'. We live in divisive times, very much 'pick a side' times. And *I* certainly need the constant reminder that there are vulnerable people and marginalized people on all sides, and that such strife and pointing fingers at groups of 'them' actually hinders my putting energy into real systemic change. The truth is always bound to our neighbors, however far away they are; it's always social. And the truth is always bound to a higher purpose: it is bound to God. Those are our orientation points.

*Who is on the outside? (Luke 4:21-30)*

In the gospel today Jesus reveals the truth, the greatest Truth. He reveals that He is the Messiah, that He is Christ, our long-awaited Savior. He says **"Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing."** At first the people react with awe, wonder, amazement. But there is a dark turn as Jesus continues speaking, as He reveals more about that salvation and who it is for. He mentions the two well-known prophets from scripture, Elijah and Elisha, and He specifically chooses stories involving them wherein foreigners and gentiles are the ones for whom miracles are performed, are the ones who play important roles in the scripture. By doing this Jesus emphasizes that this is a salvation which is for everyone,

also or even especially for outsiders like gentiles (we could say today: for refugees, for trans people, for sex workers, for poor people; those who are pushed to the sides, marginalized).

This Good News is *particularly* for the vulnerable, for those who are not living comfortable, easy lives, who are not 'on the inside'. And Jesus made this statement in His hometown, a place where people probably felt very much on the inside, seeing Him as someone familiar: **'Isn't this the son of Joseph?'** This was the Prophet, the Messiah, someone they had hoped for – but most likely with certain expectations, certain presumptions about how He would be, and whom He would be for. And instead He was revealing an uncomfortable truth, that was maybe even the opposite of what they wanted to hear. So this awe and wonder took a terrible turn and became disappointment, anger and violence.

We can put ourselves on both sides of this story. It is easy to judge the people in the hometown, who don't accept Christ, who react first with wonder, and then with anger. And yet we know that revealed truth causes growth and change, a newness, which is almost always hard, especially when it is unexpected and disappointing. As Christians we can ask ourselves (without judgment, just for awareness), do we live in a bubble, are we comfortably surrounded by people similar to ourselves? Whom are we praying with in church, who is invited to the Lord's table? Is there anyone we would refuse to pray next to? What is the significance of these answers, and these questions?

### *Living your truth*

But I mentioned two sides to the gospel, there is not just the side of having to hear a truth you may not want to that makes you grow, that makes you stretch. We are also asked conversely to live and speak our Truth, and to spread the Word. To be Christians in the world. There are countless ways to understand this, but I want to mention the aspect of being your authentic self in the world, being the way God made you. This is one way to spread the Word.

That can refer to, for example, your professional calling. A job is often just a way to make money, to survive. But sometimes you feel called towards a certain kind of work, like being an English teacher. And maybe your parents want you to become a doctor. Discerning and following your professional path can take great strength, but it can be important holy work, because it can be about discerning the gifts that God gave you and learning how to implement those gifts in the world. Another example of living your truth, of being your

authentic self, could be in relation to sexual orientation or gender. Maybe you are queer, that's how God made you, and it isn't easy to always be open about that. But whenever you are open about it, you help someone else live their truth in the world. And the community grows in beautiful ways. We saw a glorious example of that courage this past week when over 125 German employees and priests of the Catholic Church came out publicly as queer. And one last short example, maybe you're really shy; that's how God made you: an incredibly shy and introverted person. Is it possible to see that as a beautiful way of being in the world, and as a gift? Could those things that make you feel different, like an outsider, be just what the world needs? As we heard in Jeramiah, God knows us through and through, from the beginning, **"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you"**.

### *Conclusion*

Being your true authentic self in the world, and revealing that true self to others can mean friction, confrontation, denial, or rejection. These are worldly, societal problems. But living your truth is a holy act and will ultimately help others to do the same. And turned around, being confronted with someone else's truth can evoke these negative feelings in ourselves. But these negative feelings are ones of growth - if we can manage to grow through them. Don't turn away from that uncomfortable conversation, that uncomfortable stretch. As we heard in Psalms today: **Love rejoices with the truth.**