“One Job”

A sermon for the 6th Sunday of Easter, 2020

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Scripture reference: John 14:15-21

As I meditated and journaled with our passage from John’s Gospel this week, I found myself responding to it in two ways. Some days, it was exactly what I needed to hear—a promise of an Advocate…the Spirit…to guide and comfort us, Jesus’ beloved disciples—forever after his departure. But other days, it was the opposite of comforting. The Spirit, yes, but conditionally….only if we follow Jesus’ commandments, and only for we Jesus-believers.

Scripture, and the Gospels, especially, are so often this way for me. They’re like holographic or lenticular stickers—you remember those shiny silver stickers from childhood? Tilt it one way you see one thing, but tilt it the other, and you see something different? More often than I’d like, tilted one way, the Gospels are empowering, but tilted the other way, they’re unsettling, often even inauthentic to my own lived experience.

So, what do we do? How do we know which way is the “right” way to tilt them? How do we know if the image we like best, is the image that God and Christ intend?

Well, if there’s one thing I’ve learned in my prayer and preparation for preaching this week, and across countless other weeks, it is that the hologram analogy is, most often, not an apt analogy. The Word…the Good News…most often does not invite us to tilt the Gospel one way and then the other and choose the image we like best. Rather, it invites us to tilt it, or perhaps tilt *ourselves,* ever so slightly to that magic, playful spot where both images appear at the same time. That spot where the first image enriches the second, and the second enriches the first.

That was my journey with our Gospel passage this week….to leave the abrubt tilting behind, and instead, give myself over to gentleness, to openness…to expanding….such that the full richness of our Gospel passage was present all at once.

I journaled on different words in the passage…love….keep….Advocate…Spirit…Orphan….live…reveal….and I felt a softening of my rigidity. A playfulness to this passage opened up, and it all came together, sort of like that sweet spot in a hologram sticker.

I wonder if any of you have ever seen memes—internet photos--with the caption “You had one job”? These are photos where something is a little off, but it’s a really important something. Like the photo I saw online a while back—pre-coronavirus-- of a 24-hour diner…In huge bold script on the road sign out front were painted the words “OPEN ALL THE TIME,” but then, hanging on the door was one of those open/closed signs flipped to “Closed.” YOU HAD ONE JOB, people.

Or, the one of the Crack Resistant Cement factory, whose Cement Wall out front on which the factory name was painted, had a giant crack down the middle…Again, as a crack-resistant cement factory, you really did just have the ONE JOB.

These are not nearly as funny in my just describing them to you. So, if you’ve never seen one, you can Google it..LATER….But, you get the picture.

As I relaxed into the hologram of our Gospel passage this week, this is what Jesus seemed to be saying to the disciples…to all of us…YOU HAVE ONE JOB.

Let’s put this passage in context. It is part of Jesus’ farewell discourse in John’s Gospel. He has just had the Last Supper with his disciples. He’s washed their feet…he’s foretold their betrayals and denials…he’s reminded them of his own impending death…he’s commanded them to love one another. And each time, they’ve either been unable to process it, or have claimed to “totally get it…” but then ask questions that reveal they definitely do not get it. They claim to love him, to love God, to love God’s people, and yet they don’t show it….

Immediately prior to today’s passage was our passage from last Sunday…where they ask Jesus where he is going, and how they’ll know the way there…where, after hearing his answer, Philip pushes back again…”Just show us the Father, and we’ll be satisfied.” They still don’t seem to get it…

So, I imagine Jesus getting exasperated…and yelling...”Oh my Goodness!!! If you’ve got this…if you love me so much, then just keep the darn commandment I gave you…it’s one commandment…YOU’VE GOT ONE JOB…just do it! LOVE!!! If you love, then we’ll still be connected… JUST LOVE.”

It is so easy for me, for us, to get caught up in the complexity of life…in the complexity of faith…in the complexity of discipleship…today, the freeing Good News is that we do, indeed, have just one job, and if we do that one job with focus and gentleness and an expanding spirit, then the abiding presence of God—the Advocate…the Comforter…the Spirit of Truth…will be accessible to us always.

It is not a conditional If…then…if you love me, then I’ll send the Spirit…If you prove you love *Jesus*, then God will love you back….Instead, it’s a simple statement of the truth of who God is…*God is love*…how do we acces God? How do we live in God? How does God live in us? By LOVE. To quote our patron Paul’s words in Acts this morning, in LOVE, we live and move and have our being.

The Creator, who *still* creates, is accessible to us when we give ourselves over to love…The Redeemer…who embodies a resurrected life where our wounds are visible, and yet provide us new strength and compassion, is accesssible to us when we give ourselves over to love. The great Sustainer, that Spirit of truth and wisdom who guides and comforts us… is accessble to us when we give ourselves over to love…Not a tit-for-tat, but because to be liberated by God, when God *is* love—we have to open ourselves to…love.

We. Have. One. Job.

Now, of course, to love isn’t easy…it isn’t even all that straightfoward…but Jesus promised his disciples and he promises us, when we make our guiding question be “how do I, how do we, love best right now?” then things do get easier…and a good deal more straightforward. That question, “how do I love best right now” refocuses us on the essential experience and voice of God, helping to sideline other influences and voices, and helping to power our resolve.

If there is really only a single way forward, that path will come into sharp focus, and if there’s more than one way forward, with multiple paths activating love, then that becomes clearer too, reassuring us that on either path, God will be abiding with us and we with God.

In order to love best, it is important that we understand that Jesus’ use of the word love is not referring to a feeling…we do not have to feel that warm, melting feeling we often refer to as love in order to carry out our One Job. In Jesus’ “love language,” love is an action, not a feeling….that action may be gentle and warm sometimes, but other times, it may be bold and unsettling. In either circumstance, it is always an action that bends us and those whom we are acting in love of toward greater and greater freedom…greater and greater potential…greater and greater wholeness.

The most common “You had one job” meme on the internet appears to be the yellow line down the middle of a road…in this meme, photographed on countless different roads in countless different cities and towns, rather than heading straight down the middle, the line veers in and out every few meters, crossing back and forth between lanes of opposing traffic, and then straightening again, off into the sunset. I love this meme as an apt metaphor for our faith journeys precisely because it both embodies the “You had one job” truth and yet, isn’t a straight path…We, too, have Just One Job and, we too, are on a path or set of paths, that are clear and straight sometimes, and wildly curvy other times….May that One Job, LOVE, guide all of us, together, toward our own glorious horizon of liberation and restoration of all Creation….

AMEN.