

EMBRACING THE MESS

Fear of Depths

John 15:12-17

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October 30, 2016

LISTEN: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/embracing-the-mess-fear-of-depths/>

Let me ask you. Do you have a fear of heights? I do. I don't do well on ladders. In fact, in years past, with the approach of each Christmas, as we decorated our house, I would faithfully hold the ladder as Janet would string the lights up on those tall eaves. I finally became embarrassed, as certain neighbors drove by and judged me (you know who you are). So I started paying someone to string the lights! I was only thinking of my wife!

I don't know how many here have a fear of heights, but many of us have a fear of depths--a fear of going deeper into authentic relationships. One seminary professor gave his class an assignment. They were to draw a family tree and write about the high points and low points of family history. One student wrote a glowing report of his family. Perfection! No problems. He was instructed to redo the assignment and get real. That student replied he would rather take a zero on the assignment than be that honest.

Hear this parable. A woman bought a new sport utility vehicle and was driving down Main Street on a beautiful fall day, waving at her friends as she drove slowly. No one waved back and she was aggravated at their snobbery. And then she realized. The vehicle had heavily tinted glass. She could see out but no one could see in. Is that your life? No one can see in but then we ache with loneliness and wonder why.

Listen to what Jesus says about authentic relationships. "**Authentic relationships are about giving**, v. 13. A new commandment I give you..." (v. 12). It's not a suggestion. Love is not a feeling. Christ's death is both the example and the energy for deep relationships. **Authentic relationships are about mutuality and respect**. Jesus says you are his friend, not his slave (v. 14). A slave is a means to an end. A friend is enjoyed and cherished for his or her own sake. **Authentic relationships are about being vulnerable** (v. 15). Jesus, preparing to die, tells his disciples they have moved from slaves to friends and that he is taking them totally into his confidence ("I have told you everything...").

And here's another thing. **Authentic relationships bear fruit that lasts** (v. 16). I find it very instructive that Jesus uses organic, agricultural language to describe authentic relationships. Fruit that grows because of proper nutrition and cultivation. Isn't that how relationships are maintained? Listen to Richard Rohr: "When you're in that open-hearted space, your energy flows out. When you're not in that space, your energy sucks inward. It's all about who did me wrong and why I don't like 'those people.' **Any time you feel like you deserve something, it's an indication you may be hoarding love rather than letting it come and go freely.**" Guess what. We'll be dead and gone some day. But do you know what will live on? Do you know what is

eternal? Relationships. With God and others. Other people are the only things we get to take with us to heaven. So why not invest more in them now?

What keeps us from authentic relationships? Fear. When my parents were alive, they were active members here. As Mom would go out the door, I would always lean down and give her a kiss on the cheek. One Sunday a bashful man was right behind her and saw this. I looked at him and said, "Pucker up, Bill!" He was terrified!

At a deeper level, we are terrified that someone will know we are imperfect. We often have trouble getting people to accept a Stephen Minister, because they don't want people to know about their messy life. In our text, what did Jesus NOT know about the disciples' messy lives?

We will never be able to live this great love commandment in v. 12--we will never move in to fulfilling authentic relationships--until we are able to accept the plain fact that God loves us, period, mess and all. Isn't that the message of the Cross? Isn't that the power of the Cross? God takes us deep into an authentic relationship with God's Self. And God invites us to go deep with each other.