

W Thomas – 12th Sunday after Pentecost Sermon

St. Thomas Episcopal Church Oriental NC – 08-16-26

Transcript

This sermon explores the surprising outcome of a hard conversation when the love of God is involved. I'll say that one more time. This sermon explores the surprising outcome of a hard conversation when the love of God is involved.

We have two examples easily within the scriptures we've heard today, and others that we could hear as well. So let us hear Donny Osmond and the earworm in our head from Joseph and the Technicolor Dreamcoat, where he plays Joseph. I wish I could replicate any of his singing, but it's all there in that story which we heard last week when he and his coat of many colors, not Donny Osmond, Joseph, was placed by his brothers in a deep hole so he could be sold into slavery because he was just annoying the heck out of them.

And as we hear in today's particular story, we have an outcome. We have the next chapter. We have the famine coming that forces the brothers to go looking for help.

We also know the other part of this story because Joseph stayed aligned, found the love of God, and basically said, yes, Lord, anything you want me to do, any place you want me to go, I will go. If you hear echoes from last week, that was my story as well. Joseph is now fully living into his gifts and has become the one that has created all that is necessary to feed the people of Egypt and have enough to feed others.

I think the word extravagant is not a bad word, and if you then apply the word extravagant to love and spoke about the extravagant love of God, all of a sudden you have the framework for what could make a hard conversation possible in one that others could hear one another. And Joseph understands the hard conversation he is going to have with his brothers because he's recognized them. They obviously do not recognize him.

He's in all the robes of power, and they are bereft of anything. And he goes and prepares himself, basically praying in tears, help me find a way to let them know my joy in finding the lost, not my judgment on how I was treated. Help me have a conversation, a hard conversation that lets them know they are loved, and that's what happened.

He greets them now. I've got five younger brothers, so I know what it's like to have brothers and what it's like to tweak them. And so I believe Joseph held on to just enough brotherly tweak to have some fun with them, even when he was having the hard conversation, but not so much as to push away from the

embrace, the extravagant love that they were to find, because they would be surprised.

You've heard me say before, may the blessing of God find you when you least expect it and need it most. It's a matter of noticing better. They finally noticed because it was put right in their face.

They could not avoid seeing it. Joseph says, is my father alive? And of course, the next part of the story is Israel, his father comes, and his bed as well. All good news, because a hard conversation was managed out of good, deep listening to God and to one another out of that extravagant, that love of God that imbued itself in and through Joseph.

That is a wonderful story to take with us to Jesus. Now, it's a little off-putting when we hear of Jesus as we know Jesus, because we are post-resurrection people. We know all the things he's done and how he died and rose again and came back and then the Holy Spirit comes and all of that.

And it's like, who is this Jesus that will not talk to the Canaanite woman, who will not have the hard conversation with him? He's having conversations with his associates, the disciples, and they're urging him to move on because they have a narrow sense of God's love that was just for them. Now, here we are with Jesus, fully God and fully man. The theologians in the room will say, oh, we've been debating this one for a while.

How does this unfold? Well, it's kind of nice to know that Jesus can actually have a human learning curve, but it comes out of the discipline that Jesus also has deep within him of what it means to listen, to listen carefully to God, the fullness of God's love of which Jesus is certainly a part of, exposing to us and hearing the cry of someone in need. The hard conversation is the one the Canaanite woman prepared herself for. What was the motivation? The motivation for the love of child.

We all can understand such a motivation, not just to care for a stranger, but to care for one of our own flesh and blood and to go to any length to have that child healed. We understand what it meant for her to have the strength and the courage to enter into that hard conversation because of her love for her child. And I think it's the notion for me of her love, the essence of her basically laying herself bare, her willingness to say to Jesus, but even the crumbs are fresh.

Jesus awakens and is opened up. It's almost as if glass is shattered and he sees something new that was always there and began to live more fully into who he was called to be because of a hard conversation someone else brought before her. Think of how he might have learned to use that learning when he did the

parable of the Good Samaritan and used the outcast as the one to make his point.

Or think of the hard conversation he might have had with Pontius Pilate on his way to death. Or think of the hard conversation Jesus had, and this is the one that kind of fills me with joy, oddly enough, when he is hanging on the cross in that story where the two others are on cross, the other two thieves. One derides Jesus and yet the other one says, are you my savior in essence? And Jesus says, today you will be with me in paradise.

All of us have an opportunity to learn from Jesus in what it means to not run away from hard conversations, but how to live into them and find the strength to have them. And so much of it comes from honoring the one that you're with even though you may totally disagree with them in such a way that you can hear more clearly God being in the midst of it, guiding you to something you may not have realized you were being called to. May the blessing of God find you when you least expect it and need it most.

I'm going to leave you with a study object. Now I've left you with this before. Find your prayer books.

They're in front of you. Go to page 832. I want you to see it.

It's in print. It's hidden in the fold. Down towards the bottom it's called a prayer of self-dedication.

It's printed just before the prayer attributed to Saint Francis, which is also good and edifying. If you are looking for something to take in and make a part of you, as this prayer has become a part of me over the last four years, where I hear and pray it over and over again, I'm going to try to say it without looking at it. I'll get most of the words right.

Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated to you. And then use us, we pray, as you will, and always to your glory and the welfare of your people, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

I can't find a better prayer that guides me to remind me of the work I need to do before I find myself in a hard conversation.

Always to remember that if I but listen for the extravagant love of God, maybe that's what will come out of my mouth. And maybe, just maybe, I may be the vehicle God uses to help somebody realize that that which they needed most was now surprisingly put before them. All these words I offer in the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.