

Ours is no ordinary time...

We live in a pivotal time, a transformative time ...

and we live in a very dangerous time as well....

The stakes are higher in our time...

those who resort to violence to make their point can reek havoc

on an international scale with few small concoctions made in their basement

or in the back of their garage...

But.... we also live in a time of great possibility and great opportunity....

the information once reserved to the educated elite

can now be sent in a flash to the masses via the internet...

We are an interconnected global community who can not live in isolation....

no matter how much we may want to close our eyes, our hearts, or our national borders ...

and People are exploring their spirituality more than ever before....

but doing so in ways that reflect the interconnectedness of their lives.

And while it is true that more and more people are connecting less and less

to a particular denomination,

the search for God, I believe, is as alive today as it always has been.

Are you searching for God?

You know, it is the 5th Sunday of Lent.

Lent is intended to be a time for each of us to search... to pay attention,

to see ourselves, our lives.... our God more clearly...

The traditional and ancient practices of Lent: prayer, alms giving and fasting

were and are intended to help us do just that....

**In our reading today we hear
that both the disciples of John the Baptist and the Pharisees were fasting.
They did so, because they both believed the Reign of God was not yet here.
The disciples of John thought they could help inaugurate the Reign of Heaven on Earth
more quickly through very strict and difficult practices...**

**The Pharisees thought they could create the Reign of God AND
gain personal honor, prestige and power in their community,
well.... at least by looking very serious and holy ...**

**Jesus, in our reading today, disagrees with both groups!
Jesus couldn't follow the beliefs or the practices of either John's disciples or the Pharisees!**

**For Jesus...the Reign of God wasn't some time in the far distant future...
the Reign of God was NOW.**

**In the first chapter and a half of Mark's gospel,
great crowds of people have begun to follow Jesus, seek him out and beg for his help,
and Jesus as Mark says, is having tremendous success!**

He cured, ALL that came to him.

**Trying to prove Jesus' divinity was not part of Mark's thinking or teaching whatsoever,
scholars tell us but rather,**

**Mark was trying to give evidence for the truth of Jesus' teaching:
that the Reign of Heaven, the Kingdom of God was HERE... NOW.**

Well...if God's Kingdom was here 2,000 + years ago...

why is the world still like it is?

Was the message of Jesus a failure?

**Was Jesus wrong when he proclaimed that the Kingdom was here...
that the Reign of God was among us?**

No...I don't think so.

What I do think though, is what CS Lewis once said...and I paraphrase him here:

“Christianity hasn't failed...it just hasn't been tried”

The radical message of Jesus,

has been almost too much for the world to bear.

When Jesus said “No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak: otherwise the patch pulls away from it ...and a worse tear is made.

And when he said: no one puts new wine into old wineskins:

otherwise the wine will burst the skins...

he is telling us, in his unique, symbolic way ...

that what he is teaching and preaching isn't same old, same old...

But, unfortunately, for most of Christian history the radical message of Jesus has been hasn't been taught or preached or lived.

For most of Christian history the quid pro quo thinking that we are all so comfortable with has held priority.

It seems so much easier for us to feel that we can or should earn God's love by obeying God's rules...

For most of Christian history the unconditional Love, the unboundaried Compassion and the unlimited Generosity of Jesus and his God has rarely been lived.

For most of Christian history, we took a few key teachings of Jesus, and we 'dumbed them down'.

We tried to make them fit what we thought was right and just...

instead of doing just the opposite....

taking God's goodness and justice and making it a part of us.

We tried to patch his Radical Loving onto old ways of thinking and acting...

**we have tried to pour his Radical Forgiveness into our old churches like
new wine into old wine skins....**

He told us it wasn't going to work and he was right!...it hasn't worked....

**The radical message of Jesus was...and is....not just to be nice and share...
not just be good and then God would reward you...**

The radical message of Jesus was and is that:

God loves us NOW. Period. As we are. without conditions or qualifications.

God's love is free and unconditional.

All we need to do is accept it.

**Most of us since the time of Jesus, haven't been able to wrap our heads or our hearts
around this kind of love...**

Most of us have said: 'That's crazy...that's impossible!'

How could God love a wretch, a sinner, a jerk like me or him or her?

**And so most of us have closed our hearts until we thought we were good enough, worthy
enough of this magnificent love....**

This radical message of Jesus has been too much for 99% of humanity!

So...what are we to do?

Ignore his message just cuz we don't get it?

I don't think that will help!

We have 2 more weeks of Lent before we celebrate the radical good news of Easter.

What about if we took these last 2 weeks to take the message of Jesus seriously.

**To let go of anything and everything that is blocking Divine grace
from flowing in and through us.**

**What about if we took these last two weeks to experiment with what it would feel like to be
loved by the Holy One**

without doing anything special or different.

To simply say “Yes” and allow God’s Love to seep into the deep recesses of our hearts and minds..

Are you willing to take a chance,
these last 2 weeks of Lent?

Are you willing to let go of any hesitancy and to say ‘Yes’
to this most amazing *almost* unimaginable Love?

Well...what might happen then, you might ask?

Well...I could tell you what I have found, but better yet,
I would invite you to find out for yourself...

There is one thing I will tell you though,

I believe that during these dangerous, extraordinary, and pivotal times...
experiencing for ourselves the magnificent gift of Unconditional Love,
experiencing for ourselves the Reign of Heaven is Earth...
is absolutely, hands down worth any risk we might imagine....

Amen.