

## The Personal Process of Global Transformation

The icon that I show now each week is the earliest depiction we have of Jesus. It comes from the very early 300's. I show it because it is an icon of non-duality. It says what words cannot say.

In my teachings I am seeking to traverse the gap between the no-longer and the not-yet. We are living in this gap on many different levels and in many different groupings.

The world and the systems of the world continue to evolve. Many of the human systems of this world do not like this and are attempting to return to days of some imagined glory. This reactionary living is revealing a nasty underside of human, cultural and societal personality. Things like white racism, nationalism, homophobia and other forms of fear-mongering are taking front and center stage. As someone said to me recently, those who can yell the loudest, on both the right and the left, are getting the most attention. There is a fear that the systems of the world are devolving into a tribalism from which we may not be able to recover.

I believe that there is another and better way. Guided by peace, love, joy, patience and humility; we are stepping off into the unknown future with the faith that we will either find something solid to stand on or we will be taught to fly. Experiencing this traction and transcendence is what our spiritual work is all about about.

I'm using the questions Jesus as a guide into and through this territory.

Here is the question we are up to for today. It is one almost everyone knows whether go to church or not:

Jesus said, "You see the sliver in your friend's eye, but don't see the timber in your own eye. When you take the timber out of your own eye, then you will see well enough to remove the sliver from your friend's eye."

Here is the way Eugene Peterson translates this:

It's easy to see a smudge on your neighbor's face and be oblivious to the ugly sneer on your own. Do you have the nerve to say, "Let me wash your face for you," when your own face is distorted by contempt?

Before we get into an effort to understand this teaching I want to point out that if you read the entire Jesus narrative, you will discover, if you did not already know it, that Jesus is an incredibly judgmental and critical person.

Here is just one example:

"I've had it with you! You're hopeless, you religion scholars, you Pharisees! Frauds! Your lives are roadblocks to God's kingdom. You refuse to enter, and you won't let anyone else in either. You're hopeless!" (Matthew 23:13ff)

I could give you many other examples. For example, he called one of his closest disciples "Satan."

What is going on here? Just sit with this apparent contradiction for a while. We'll come back to it.

Since we last met, scientists, using what is called The Event Horizon Telescope, have obtained the first image of a supermassive black hole and its shadow. Here is a photo of some of the sixty-six radio antenna telescopes that were part of a network positioned all over the world making this telescope, to quote the National Geographic who broke the story, the size of the globe. The image reveals the central black hole of Messier 87, a massive galaxy in the Virgo cluster. The elliptical galaxy M87, the dominant member of the neighboring Virgo galaxy cluster, is the home of several trillion stars, a supermassive black hole, and a family of roughly 15,000 globular star clusters. For comparison, our Milky Way galaxy contains only a few hundred billion stars and about 150 globular clusters.

This galaxy is fifty million light years away from us. The scientists who write about this say that this black hole contains the same mass as 6.5 billion suns. The scientists collected a petabyte of data - that is one quadrillion bytes - and it took them two years to assemble the photo. Another way to think of the size of the data collected is that it is the equivalent to 5,000 years of MP3 files, or according to one study I read, the entire selfie collection over a lifetime of 40,000 people.

(If you are interested in following up on the original posting of this from National Geographic, go here - [<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/2019/04/first-picture-black-hole-revealed-m87-event-horizon-telescope-astrophysics/>])

There is also a site for the Event Horizon Telescope - [<https://eventhorizontelescope.org/>])

Why am I bringing this up?

For at least two reasons:

First, this is one of the ongoing revelations about the energy field in which we live. It is this kind of information that is causing us to rethink everything. This sort of information makes us rethink the assumptions we have made about who we are, who or what God is and the role of religion, especially the role that “revelation” plays in religion. The idea that there is a “god” out there who sticks his finger into human affairs from time to time flies out of the window with this information. As do many of the other religious notions we have - for example, the one of heaven being an actual place that is “up there” somewhere.

When Michael Morwood comes to talk with us, this is the kind of thing he will be focusing on - rethinking all of our religious and theological notions in light of this kind of new knowledge.

The narcissistic notion about how special and unique we humans are and how we alone are the focus of a divine, theistic being evaporates. Likely there is no such god who said, “I know what. I’ll pick this particular planet and create some people to love me and, because this god knows everything, when they screw that up, I’ll

go down and live among them, get myself crucified and that will fix everything - for those who believe.”

Don't get me wrong, I do believe that there is a really important, even life-giving spiritual story, but that ain't it. Stay tuned.

The second reason I am bringing this up, and this seldom makes the headlines, is that similar breakthroughs are happening in the fields of religious and biblical knowledge. Because of archeological studies and discoveries, because of globalization and improved communication, because of anthropological and cultural studies - and other disciplines - we simply know more now than we did when I was a student in seminary.

I had a really good religious and theological education from what were and are considered some of the best educational institutions that exist - at least in this country. But we didn't know then what we know now about, for example, what the life and times were like in the culture into which Jesus was born and grew up. We have been so affected by the religious images and teachings of the Western world, by the art, the books, the movies, etc. that we have seen, that we really have to work to have a more accurate picture of who Jesus was, how he grew, who his teachers were, what cultural, political and economic influences caused him to shape his message the way he did.

One of my big laments, and I've said this numerous time so forgive the repetition, is that this kind of knowledge and information simply didn't make it, and hasn't made it except for a few exceptions, into the education program of most Christian churches.

When Michael Morwood began connecting his teachings of and about Jesus to his new learnings from the field of cosmology, the people loved it. But, when the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church learned of it, they forced him out of the priesthood. Why?

The main reason is that what he was teaching went against the central teachings and authority of the Committee on Doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church. Though there were numerous charges the two main ones had to do with the notion

of God being “up and out there.” How could Scripture be inspired or dictated by an external theistic deity if there weren’t one? And, even more important, the understanding - and this is speaking metaphorically, you understand - that Jesus did not open God’s closed heart to humans. God’s heart has never been closed. One of the first memorial lines I got from Richard Rohr was that Jesus did not change God’s mind about us. Jesus’ work was to change our minds about God.

There is not a person in the Western world who does not have some notion of Jesus. It is impossible not to. We are entering one of the two cultural periods where Jesus is lifted into everyone’s awareness. I’m speaking of course of this period we are in - Holy Week and Easter. Easter is becoming a big commercial event. The other, of course, is Christmas.

Since both religious and spiritual illiteracy are very high in our culture, I’m guessing that most people really couldn’t tell you what Easter is about it. Among church going people, most will tell you that Easter is when Jesus rose from the dead. In the Western world, whether one is a liberal or a conservative, this resurrection is a very individual matter. Jesus, the man, rose from the dead either literally or metaphorically. Most church going people, in the Western world, could not tell you, because they are not aware of it, that this individual emphasis occupies a very small space in history and a very small percentage of the Christian world.

Here is another example of recent discoveries in biblical scholarship. John Dominic Crossan and his wife, Sarah Sexton Crossan, have recently published a book filled with photographs of their archeological discoveries about this very topic. The book is “Resurrecting Easter: How the West Lost and the East Kept the Original Easter Vision.”

This sort of information I find exciting, liberating, refreshing and more. Other people find this sort of thing frightening, threatening and dangerous. Whose right? That’s the first question dualism raises. Who is right and who is wrong?

I remember at the end of the first fight Sherry and I ever had I said, “You know, you could be as right as I am about this. Or, I could be as wrong as you are.” That’s the last time I used that line!

As you are well aware, the Methodist denomination is in a crisis about the matter of full inclusion of LBGQTQ+ people at all levels in the life of the church. There are some who favor this. They are called “Progressives.” And, there are some who are opposed to it. They are called “Traditionalists.” Whose right?

You don't have to agree with what I'm about to say but I'm going to claim some expertise about the Bible. To look to the Bible for guidance on this specific issue is like looking to the Bible for how to design an airplane. The information simply isn't there. The people and communities who put the writings in the Bible did not have the information or orientation that we do about sexual identity or sexual orientation. Even the instructions for heterosexuality are hopelessly out of date.

If you follow the Bible's teaching, no woman can initiate divorce or speak in church. Without sufficient context, we can't even understand Jesus. The Bible and its interpretation have been shaped by a profound and frequently misguided patriarchal stance. For this reason the Bible has been used to hurt people, to exclude them, to judge them, to control them. You know that the Bible, less than a hundred years ago in this country, has been used to justify slavery. I did not just say, “Traditionalists are racist.”

I am of the personal opinion that the legal, political, operational side of the church should be open to everyone regardless of their sexual orientation. I am also and with the same intensity of the personal opinion that the legal, political, operational side of the church should be open to people who do not hold this view. Everyone is welcome.

There is a great metaphor, the whole thing is metaphorical actually, in the Easter story. It is at what we call “the last supper” when Jesus says, “One of you who is eating with me is going to betray me.” You know what we did? We didn't say, “It's Judas!” We said, “Are you talking about me. Is it me?”

Jesus said, “You see the sliver in your friend's eye, but don't see the timber in your own eye. When you take the timber out of your own eye, then you will see well enough to remove the sliver from your friend's eye.”

By the way, for those of you who keep us with matters like this, this saying is found at least four different places in the collection of Jesus' sayings and is considered as something that Jesus actually said.

The ability to make judgments without being judgmental is one of life's most important spiritual skills.

I don't know about you but I'm slapping labels on people all the time. What Jesus has asked me to do is to love people all the time.

My spiritual teacher said to me nearly fifty years ago, when I complained to him about my being such a failure at non-judging, said, "Be in the world as you are when walking in the woods. When you walk in the woods, you don't judge the trees. You just notice them. You don't say, 'This tree is too big. That tree is too small. That tree is ugly. And, so forth.' You just notice the trees. But, when you walk among people you are constantly evaluating them. Be in the world as you are in the woods."

Now, of course, this doesn't mean that everything and anything goes. If someone or some organization is doing something that violates people, hurts them; move to stop it.

Don't try to stop judging. You can't. Just notice it. Notice how much you do it. Don't judge yourself for judging. Just being aware of the deep habit can lead to a more non-judgmental stance.

The moment you notice that you are judging, you are out of it. That space may not last long. Our goal is to get it bigger and bigger.

When you do notice the workings of your mind you will notice that most of what we think is so petty, so shallow, and, certainly, so self-serving.

How could we ever put our trust in our own thoughts and opinions when we see how self-serving, petty, paranoid, narcissistic and needy our thoughts and opinions reveal us to be? We spend so much of our time thinking how right we are and how

wrong everyone else is. We can be so naive. Out of this stance we lose the ability to think critically and speak truthfully.

A police officer pulls over a speeding car. The officer says, "I clocked you at 80 miles an hour, sir."

The driver says, "Gee, officer, I had it on cruise control at 60. Perhaps your radar gun needs calibrating." Not looking up from her knitting the wife says, "Now, don't be silly dear. You know this car doesn't have cruise control."

As the officer is writing out the ticket, the driver looks over at his wife and growls, "Can't you please keep your mouth shut for once?"

The wife smiles demurely and says, "You should be thankful your radar detector went off when it did."

As the officer makes out the second ticket for the illegal radar detector unit, the man glowers at his wife and says through clenched teeth, "Darn it, woman, can't you keep your mouth shut?" The officer frowns and says, "And I notice that you're not wearing your seat belt, sir. That's an automatic \$150 fine."

The driver says, "Yeah, well, you see officer, I had it on, but took it off when you pulled me over so that I could get my license out of my back pocket." The wife says, "Now, dear, you know very well that you didn't have your seat belt on. You never wear your seat belt when you're driving."

And as the police officer is writing out the third ticket the driver turns to his wife and barks, "WHY DON'T YOU PLEASE SHUT UP??" The officer looks over at the woman and asks, "Does your husband always talk to you this way, Ma'am?"

"Only when he's been drinking."

What got Jesus in trouble was speaking truth to power. In essence what he said to the emperor was, "There is one God and you are not it."

The Kingdom of God, the rule of God, is everything our culture is not: it is gracious, fearless (have you noticed how the powerful are so paranoid?), beautiful, trustworthy, healing and powerful in weakness. This is the symbolism of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a jackass rather than a stallion. This is the symbol of the cross. How did it come to pass that we who come into the presence of the Sacred by means of a wound - a dying, bleeding body - have gotten so identified with power and the powerful?

Maybe Jesus changed his mind, you know. Perhaps all through his ministry he hung out with the poor and those that the world called “sinners.” Then after the resurrection he changed his mind and decided only to hang out with good, white, Protestant Christians; particularly those who believed the right things and hated gays and lesbians.

The Kingdom Jesus talked about and demonstrated was one where everybody was invited. Our culture is leading us more and more into isolation. We are encouraged to compare ourselves to others and to differentiate ourselves from others. If we fall for that lie, we won't see the oneness of everything and everyone. The teaching of Jesus is that “everything belongs.” This is why he said, “Don't judge.”

When we cannot embrace what God embraces then we project what we cannot embrace in ourselves onto other countries, other races, other genders and so forth. Both liberals and conservatives do this.

If there is one lesson or truth that I would like for you to get from our times together, it is this: God is not out there.

When we get it that God loves us, all of who we are, the totality of who we are and not just when we are good or right then all dualistic thinking begins to fall away and that is what deals with our addictions to thoughts and opinions. The container that holds us is the healing hands of God - not our political party, not our country, not our race, not our denomination, not a set of beliefs, not what we have, not what we've done - none of that.

So Jesus taught that we are not to judge because judgment is very often a means of control. When we are judging we are not pursuing the truth. When we are judging

we are either trying to make ourselves secure or we are trying to undo other people by categorizing them in one way or another. When we judge someone to be superior to us, or inferior to us, to be right or wrong, to be good or bad; we are blocking any real insight or compassion for ourselves or for the other.

My goal for this talk today, at least one of them, is that you have in your spiritual understanding a better and a different place to stand. That is, that you have both traction and transcendence. The non-dual stance is: we are loved and responsible for loving. I hope that out of our ongoing spiritual practice we can grow in our capacity to offer love and acceptance to all people everywhere.

Removing the log from one's eye is not an easy process.

Here is what I currently think it means: if we do not see, recognize - and most of these are unconscious, which is why it takes such work - the reservoir of expectations, assumptions and beliefs we are immersed in, we will understand all new things the same old way. Nothing new will ever happen to us or to our world. A new idea held by the old self is not a new idea. It is not what is in front of us that makes us happy or miserable. It's what is inside of us and how we greet what is in front of us. Without maturity in seeing, we never see the other. We live out of our own inner states over and over again. This is the final narcissism and instability of any non-self-reflective culture or person.

One of the things I have grown in my appreciation of over the years of study and reflection is on how many levels and in how many ways writings of any tradition's scripture can be read and interpreted. One of the episodes from the Jesus narrative about this Holy Week we are in has Jesus saying to a couple of his disciples, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Beloved needs it.'"

God, Divine Presence, Sacred Mystery, The Ground of Being - whatever word you choose - needs you. Your time, your heart, your prayer, your faith, and your doubt - Sacred Mystery needs you. Your thoughts, your voice, the way you treat the people you love and those you see as strangers, those you see as hard to love, how you care for what breaks your heart, what you hope for in the dark long before the light

has come. Divine Presence is saying directly to you, I need you to convey me into people's hearts. Though you may think of yourself as a plain ordinary and waiting donkey, you are what is needed. Listen, Divine Presence is saying, "I have sent my servants to untie you."

No matter where you go this week, no matter what happens, remember this: you carry precious cargo. So, watch your step.