

Living Lent | Day 29

Seeing Others Through the Lens of Grace

Early in the morning Jesus came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."

John 8:1–11 RSV

Encouragement for the Lenten Journey:

Seeing each other as human beings is one of the most Christian things we can do. Sounds easy, right? Not really. Human beings are notoriously adept at treating each other less as fellow persons and more as pains in the neck, problems to be fixed, or points to be made.

Of course, this is nothing new. Back in Jesus' day people were all too happy to point fingers. When the Pharisees hauled before Jesus the woman caught in adultery and demanded His judgment of her, she was anything but a fellow human to them. To them, she was an object lesson. A thing. An example. Proof positive for their see-

this-is-everything-wrong-in-the-world-today-and-someone's-gotta-do-something-about-it mentality. (Incidentally, they weren't too keen on Jesus either. He was more problem than person to them, too.)

The fact is, she had sinned. She had messed up big time and was caught in the act. That much was never in dispute. But where the Pharisees saw her as a point to be made in the protection of their own power and worldview, Jesus saw her as human. Seeing others as human means believing they can change, and that we can change, too. It means giving second looks, second chances. It means mercy. It means grace. Whether we want to or not, we all have people in our hearts to whom we point and say, "They are what is wrong in the world today. Life would be better, brighter, righter, if they would just ... stop."

So be honest. Whom do you struggle to see as human these days? Maybe it's an individual: your annoying uncle, your estranged sister, that opinionated coworker. Maybe it's a group: a demographic, a political party, a subsection of the culture who sees the world differently than you. Maybe—like the woman brought before Jesus—they are actually sinning. Maybe they are just different.

We can always use others' failings, sins, differences, and humanity to prove our points, but what actually is the point? If the point is personal vindication, or righteous indignation, or the see-I-told-you-so-ism that pushes us all further apart, then we are missing it entirely. Jesus used our failings, sins, differences, and humanity to prove his point, too, but his point was mercy. Rather than casting us off due to our humanity, he took it on and brought us all closer in.

So don't let anyone fool you. Seeing each other as human beings is one of the most Christian things we can do, but it is not easy. It is hard work. It takes effort. It demands sacrifice. If you're not sure about that, just look at the Cross. But here, my friends, is the beautiful mystery, the strange and wily grace of it all. When we walk that way with Christ and finally begin to see others through his eyes, we don't just begin to see one another as human. That's actually when we begin to see one another as divine.

Contributor and Contributing Body of Christ

The Reverend Thomas A. "Lonnie" Lacey a husband, father, writer, preacher, and Episcopal priest. He is currently the rector of St. Anne's Episcopal Church in Tifton, Georgia, where he has served the last twelve years. St. Anne's began as a tiny mission in the 1890's and has become a thriving presence and guidance in the Tifton Community throughout its history. St. Anne's congregation led by Father Lonnie continue to build on the foundations laid by generations past while also expanding into new areas of local outreach, regional and foreign mission, and ministry to and with the young, including the Children of Morningstar. Father Lonnie has said that "any day he gets to tell others about grace is a good day, and he is ridiculously hopeful about what God is doing in the world even when division seems to get the better of us." And yes, Father Lonnie is the guy who did that dancing priest Hamilton thing on YouTube!

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