

“Our Inviting Freedom”

The following is an account of a prayer I discovered on the internet. It begins, **“What is all this touching in church?”** “It used to be a person could come to church and sit in the pew and not be bothered by all this friendliness and certainly not by touching. I used to come to church and leave untouched. Now I have to be nervous about what's expected of me. I have to worry about responding to the person sitting next to me. Oh, I wish it could be the way it used to be; I could just ask the person next to me: How are you? And the person could answer: Oh, just fine, and we'd both go home ... strangers who have known each other for twenty years.

But now the minister asks us to look at each other. I'm worried about that hurt look I saw in that woman's eyes. Now I'm concerned, because when the minister asks us to greet one another, the man next to me held my hand so tightly I wondered if he had been touched in years. Now I'm upset because the lady next to me cried and then apologized and said it was because I was so kind and that she needed a friend right now.”

The prayer continues, “Now I have to get involved.” **“Now I have to suffer when this community suffers.”** Now I have to be more than a person coming to observe a service. That man last week told me I'd never know how much I'd touched his life. All I did was smile and tell him I understood what it was to be lonely.

Lord, I'm not big enough to touch and be touched! The stretching scares me. What if I disappoint somebody? What if I'm too pushy? What if I cling too much? What if somebody ignores me?”

The prayer becomes even more introspective, “‘Pass the peace.’ ‘The peace of Christ be with you.’ ‘And also with you.’ And mean it.” **“Lord, I can't resist meaning it!”** “I'm touched by it, I'm enveloped by it! I find I do care about that person next to me! I find I AM involved! And I'm scared.”

The prayer concludes, “O Lord, be here beside me.” **“You touch me, Lord, so that I can touch and be touched!”** “So that I can care and be cared for! So that I can share my life with all those others that belong to you! All this touching in church – Lord, it's changing me! (As reported by David E. Leininger, Christian Globe Illustrations, www.Sermons.com)

That prayer reminds me of the transformation Jesus sought to lead his Original Disciples into during his last meal and evening with them. **There was resistance to Jesus' efforts to help them to change, so he provided them a dramatic, radical, and challenging action.** They would have never expected him to do what he did for them! They might have grudgingly been willing to do it for him but they were completely caught off guard when he began to wash their feet! Impetuous Peter, the eldest disciple, demonstrated the shock all of them felt on that occasion.

The Gospel of John reported in verse 6, “He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, ‘Are you going to wash my feet, Lord?’” Jesus tried to calm Peter down and overcome his objections to Jesus washing his feet – his being touched by his Teacher – his Master in such a servant fashion. Emboldened and a bit cocky, the eldest disciple tried to control Jesus by declaring in **verse 8a, “Never at any time will you wash my feet!”** Time was running out because the moment was quickly approaching when Jesus would be betrayed, so our Lord brought Peter back in line by **confronting him in verse 8b with the requirement, “If I do not wash your feet, you will no longer be my disciple.”** Peter still did not understand what Jesus was doing, and so, he totally reversed his position and asked that his Teacher not only clean his feet but his whole body! Jesus was bemused by Peter's about face and explained his actions were not a replacement for a bath.

Through his washing of his disciples' feet, Jesus empowered and called them to be free of the self-centered and selfish approach to life, which was so prevalent in those days and up to and through today. The nature

of the transformation Jesus led his disciples into was very much like that of the person, who prayed the prayer at beginning of this Sermon. All of them, like us, were called to be liberated from selfishness and to be lifted up into the New Life in Christ – to follow the example of loving and serving as demonstrated by God’s Son, Jesus Christ!

Jesus explained that when he told his disciples in verses 14-17, “I, your Lord and Teacher, have just washed your feet. You, then, should wash one another’s feet. I have set an example for you, so that you will do just what I have done for you. I am telling you the truth: no slaves are greater than their master, and no messengers are greater than the one who sent them. Now that you know this truth, how happy you will be if you put it into practice!”

Now, Jesus was not just calling for the Original Disciples to serve – agape love one another but for all of us to do the same for each other and for all people. That is where the Transformation or Freedom Jesus calls us to live out has a transformative or freeing power for others. It becomes extremely inviting, especially for those, who are tired of the dog eat dog rat race of the world’s selfish way of living. But, it goes even further, because our Inviting Freedom, which we have as we follow Jesus’ Call and Example also means we lift up and welcome all people, especially the most vulnerable – the children, the weak, the sick, the oppressed, the victimized, the poor, the elderly, and the rejected by society – yes, even by the religious culture.

Jesus demonstrated that New Life – that Transformed Life as he lifted up the vulnerable, rejected, and outcasts over and against the criticism of his legalistic religious adversaries. Yes, Jesus dared to touch the untouchable, to associate with – even eat with those, who were not Jewish Law abiding enough, even those, who he had raise from the dead, and people, who were considered “sinners” – animals or infestations – those unworthy of God’s Love. Jesus touched all people he met with his agape love and peace, so he lifted them up – provided them and us with his inviting freedom to love and serve – to live the New Life in Christ, instead of mistreating, abusing, and focusing only on our personal gain.

It has been reported that many white evangelicals support the Administration primarily because they want the type of judges, who will turn back the clock on certain peoples’ rights to fulfill the white evangelical agenda against everyone different from themselves. With the impending resignation of Justice Kennedy from the Supreme Court, I am sure the white evangelical crowd is extremely happy and expecting their dreams of winning their culture war through the Supreme Court will quickly come to fruition. Now, if the white evangelicals, who profess themselves to be Christians, have those dreams fulfilled, then they and their allies will be successful in getting the Federal Government of the United States to impose Supreme Court approved laws, which oppress and harm many persons, who are not like the white evangelicals – many who are vulnerable to abuse and mistreatment. Our nation will be following the legalistic prejudice and injustice of the adversaries of Jesus – the Pharisees. **If that all happens, then those of us, who are transformed – freed by God’s Agape Love shown in Jesus Christ, will have an even greater responsibility to share “Our Inviting Freedom” with those, who are abused, oppressed, and/or rejected, especially with reference to the vulnerable and those, who suffer from the reversal of their rights.**

Yes, Jesus modeled a new kind of relationship in this world – one that put no one above another. Indeed, he always lifted up those who were put down. As Jesus’ “own,” are we “going and doing likewise” in the world by lifting those whose path we cross? Or do we bring others down? **What random acts of kindness will you be caught doing that creates the ties that bind?** Amen.