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Redwoods Presbyterian Church
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John 12:20-33
"Lent 3: Self-hatred"

Lent is a time to reflect on the darkness and death of things as we take the journey with Jesus to the cross. In this journey, Jesus looks to the cross and reflects on the destructive and death-dealing aspects of life. We do so too. Jesus reflects on his own death and we try to figure out the meaning of this for our lives.

Lent looks at the dark side. The term "self-hatred" is a Lenten concept. I became aware of the concept in phrases like "self-hating Jew." If you're a Jew and you criticize anything Jewish you're called a self-hating Jew. If you are a Jew and you criticize Zionism you are a self-hating Jew. If you're a Jew and you express concern about what Israel is doing in Palestine you are a self-hating Jew. "Jews for Justice" object to this and rightfully so.

I've discovered that "Self-hatred" is a subject in its self and has a more precise definition. Wikipedia states that, "Self-hatred refers to an extreme dislike and hatred of oneself, or being angry at or even prejudiced towards oneself. The term is also used to designate a dislike or hatred of a group, family, social class, mental illness, or stereotype to which one belongs and/or has. For instance, 'ethnic self-hatred' is the extreme dislike of one's ethnic group or cultural classification....The term is also used by extremists to belittle those from the same ethnic group who do not share the views of the labeler."

Self-hatred is a feature in personality disorders and can be related to self-concept issues, so I wouldn't want to be harsh with those who hate themselves. In many cases there are deep psychological reasons which need a caring response and therapy. However, in its broader context and the way it is generally used it has a negative effect on society

Since it is a negative quality it is an excellent candidate for Lent. Lent meets us in our brokenness and takes us to and through the cross for healing and wholeness.

It's ironic then that Jesus in the text today seems to encourage self-hatred. He tells his disciples prior to his death, "Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life." This is the only life I have, why shouldn't I love it? And those who hate their life in this world will take this hate into eternal life? What is Jesus saying?

Like much of his words, this sentence needs unpacking. Later in the text Jesus compares his death to judgment: "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out." The ruler of this world is associated with evil forces in the world which touch, and have the potential to infect, everyone.

When people succumb to these forces they do things like exploit their neighbors, steal their goods, abuse their spouses and children, engage in unjust wars (which begs the question as to whether there are so-called “just wars”), despoil the environment and injure workers for greedy gain such as the over-use of pesticides in developing countries, and disrespect for self and others. The list is endless.

Suellen and I watched a “Frontline” documentary yesterday called “Growing up Online.” It shows the effects of computers on teens. One can add cyber-bullying and internet predators to the list.

The world of the list or life in this world is what Jesus calls us to hate. Hate is a strong word so Jesus is serious. He is not saying hate yourself. He says hate your life in the world when it harms you and others. If you love *this* life you will lose real life.

He says in effect, “Anything that demeans or abuses crucifies me and others.” Last Sunday the bell choir rang the tune of “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?”

Dr. James Noel, professor of African American Christianity at San Francisco Theological Seminary says that this key spiritual was composed by early American slaves as veiled songs against their slave masters and the system that oppressed them.

The song questions humanity’s complicity in the death of Jesus. The items mentioned earlier are the actions of human beings that crucify Jesus. Jesus is acutely aware of what sends him to his doom.

As a way of understanding what the cross is all about and its relevance to our world Dr Noel encourages us to sing this hymn and to reflect on the questions it poses.

Let us remain seated and turn to the spiritual in our hymnals and sing together hymn #102, *Were You There?*

As indicated in my last sermon, there’s lots of talk about death in Lent. As Jesus contemplates his own death and indicates how he will die he says that the way to deal with a “hated” life is to die to it.

He uses an analogy from farming: “Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” “Fruit” echoes Paul’s fruit of the spirit which is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, generosity and self-control.”

Jesus says: “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He envisions a new world where *he* is lifted up instead of the so-called ruler of the world.

People who live by the fruit of the spirit will be a new community of love and compassion. They will be drawn together in unison to manifest Jesus’ world. In this new community we love our lives and ourselves. There is no hatred of self and others. Life is affirmed.

We shall do that now in a response to this sermon. Please turn to your insert for the "Response: An Affirmation of Faith." You will read the bold face – boldly!

In response to the word reflected on, let us share an affirmation of faith.

We believe in God
who empowers and heals,
and calls us forth.

We believe in our creativity.

Making and transforming beauty out of words and notes,
images and colors, lines and pictures...
and silence.

We believe in doing justice.

Justice that compels and empowers us
to risk whatever we must risk to create a climate
in which all people can be who they are.

We believe in our dreams.

We experience the world as it is,
in both its ugliness and beauty,
and we see what it can become.

We believe in making peace.

A peace that is based on openness,
honesty and compassion.

We believe in hope.

We expect change to continue to occur in our world.
We rely on our courage to continue
to bring about these changes.

We believe in love.

A passionate love within and around us
that laughs and cries,
challenges and comforts,
a healing love that perseveres.

We believe in potential.

We know who we are,
painful as that can be at times,
yet we continue to call each other
to become more of who we are.

We believe in celebrating.

We remember and we commemorate.
We create rituals.
We play and dance and sing.

We believe in our diversity.

We affirm our many
similarities and differences,
colors and cultures,
emotions and thoughts.

We believe in life.

Life that wells up within
and flows out of us like a streaming fountain.

**We believe we are good and holy,
a sacred part of all creation.**

Amen.