

**“Reigniting! A Sense of Honesty”****A Sermon for University Congregational Church****Sunday, July 12, 2020****Rev. Paul Ellis Jackson**

Reigniting! A Sense of Honesty

Traditional Word:

The Parable of the Sower Explained

11 “Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. 12 The ones on the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. 13 The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe only for a while and in a time of testing fall away. 14 As for what fell among the thorns, these are the ones who hear; but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. 15 But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance.

--Luke 8:11-15

REIGNITING: A SENSE OF HONESTY

Today we turn back to our work with Julia Cameron's book: *It's Never Too Late to Begin Again*-- as we explore *Reigniting: A Sense of Honesty*. One of the most empowering things we can do is to know, understand and advocate for our opinions. I think it's sometimes too easy, especially in this politically polarized time, to forgo some of our opinions for the sake of going along to get along. We want to be good—nice—kind—and we often are, except for those rare moments when we're not. For me, those moments are usually behind the wheel of my car. If you have ever been or ever will be a victim of my enmity on the road, I apologize. I think it has to do with my great impatience and my enthusiastic desire to get to the next thing. It could also have to do with the fact that some of you are really terrible drivers. But, that's just my opinion.

Cameron wants use to explore our sense of honesty by understanding and owning our opinions. She writes that "one of the biggest hindrances to speaking with complete honesty is the fear that we will offend those we interact with and they will reject us. As we slowly move toward owning and articulating our true feelings, values, and opinions, the unexpected result is that other people, despite their initial surprise at the change (if we didn't do this prior), ultimately feel safer with us than they once did. When we know where we stand, so do others. And paradoxically, we then develop more secure—and honest—relationships.

For me, much of this work requires me to ask myself: Why do I think that way about that topic? For instance: Why am I so impassioned about social justice? I wasn't raised to be an activist, it was something than was revealed to me through my work

in ministry. Are these my own values or did someone else impose them upon me? And, are these opinions regarding the inherent value and dignity of each human something I can sustain? Or am I just trying to live up to others' expectations of what a Christian minister should be?

The Truth Is...that impulse to please others...to live up to expectations drive much more of our day-to-day behavior than we'd like to admit. These expectations change as we experience major life events and sometimes those in our lives can't dance our new dance with us—they don't know the steps—or they don't want to learn them. It's difficult to remember sometimes that when our lives change, due to a major illness, retirement, job change, etc.....these changes have a ripple pattern that extends outward from our lives and affect everyone in our sphere....so, trying to please others is a great way to live a life of dishonesty—because we tell little white lies so as not to disappoint others in our lives.

One of our most difficult places to express this sense of honesty is in our theological beliefs. So often we believe what we believe because we have always believed them. And that is the default position of most Christians. When we start trying to have honest discussions about why we believe certain things and don't believe others, we get uncomfortable, because we start messing with the foundations of our faith. And anyone who knows anything about foundations can tell you, once you start messing with them, entire structures can come a-tumbling down! Here at University Congregational Church we take faith seriously—but not literally and not fundamentally—so questions and doubts about faith are welcome. Also, since we are

a covenantal church (and not a creedal church) there is no set of beliefs that you are required to have to be in community with us. Our covenant simply states that you will walk with us in the same spirit that Jesus walked.

Speaking of Jesus—he had some interesting things to say about honest. What I take away from Jesus' ministry on earth is this: Honesty without love is nothing! It's useless, pointless and it supports empire, not relationship and not community. We see this echoed in one of his famous parables. Side note—it's difficult to discuss honesty in Jesus' parable, because they are often spoken in riddle-form. He's not exactly forthcoming with the truth in these teachings. The idea is that he will lead the listener in the right direction and then they will discern the meaning of the parable for themselves. Having said that, though, the Parable of the Sower has some interesting things for us to consider this morning.

Hear now these words from one of Jesus' teachings: "4 When a great crowd gathered and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable: 5 "A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. 6 Some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture. 7 Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. 8 Some fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold." As he said this, he called out, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen! 9 Then his disciples asked him what this parable meant. 10 He said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets[b] of the kingdom of God; but to others I speak[c] in parables, so that

'looking they may not perceive,

And listening they may not understand.'

11 "Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. 12 The ones on the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. 13 The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe only for a while and in a time of testing fall away. 14 As for what fell among the thorns, these are the ones who hear; but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. 15 But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance."

Wow—not only does the Gospel of Luke give us Jesus' teaching, but this writer then also give us their take on the meaning of the teaching.

But the truth in this lesson seems to be one that guides us towards a deeper faith in the new religion being espoused by the Gospel writer. Honesty seems to be relative to the hearer's position to the word—are you on the path, in the weeds, on rocky soil or are you a good place for the word to land and take root? Honesty in our theological beliefs is contextual in much of our faith. So, when we better understand the context of the scriptures, it can help inform a more honest and deeper faith. Not a faith simply because someone else has interpreted it in one way and that was comfortable for you and so you've stuck with it. Honest faith requires questions.

One of the most frightening situations we can find ourselves in is when we are in a state of self-doubt. Self-doubt is one of our most powerful opponents because when we doubt ourselves, we have only ourselves to fight back against. Our self-doubt knows just where to hit us to inflict maximum damage: “Oh, you think you’d like to try to garden? Remember that time in your youth when you killed all of those tomato plants? Huh? Remember how disappointed you were in yourself? Well, what makes you think that anything has changed?” Our memory yells at us: “When in doubt, DON’T! So, we often don’t.”

Today’s primary task is to dismantle the doubts that freeze us into inaction. And one of the best ways to do this is to give ourselves the dignity of grieving our wounds, whatever those wounds may be—creative or otherwise. We often acknowledge our wounds, but we also often feel we should move beyond them—we stuff them deep down and try to deny their existence. Acknowledging our past injuries can help us avoid the pitfalls of self-doubt that they may create.

Julia Cameron’s exercise for this part of our work goes like this—do you have your notebook or paper? OK—let’s spend a few minutes on this exercise. Complete the following sentences:

As a child, I felt discouraged when....

I felt at a loss about....

I wish I hadn’t.....

A person who I suspect damaged me creatively was.....

I wonder if.....

I want to identify a specific type of toxic person in our midst. These are the people who believe in brutal candor: honesty without love. They say the most awful things and follow it up with, I'm just being honest. And, often times they are. But I caution you—honesty without love is useless. Your message of “honesty” will fall short of the target because all the other person heard and felt was your lack of love. How many times have you had someone in your life say to you: Well, I have to be honest with you, I don't think you have...and then they list whatever trait or behavior bothers them: remember this: We don't like in other people what we don't like in ourselves. Let me repeat that: We don't like—and criticize—in other people what we don't like in ourselves. Think on that the next time someone criticizes you for something—and then realize that they themselves do or have that exact same thing and their simply holding you to a ridiculous expectations. And then also remember that when you have the desire to criticize someone in your life—you're actually criticizing the fact that you have the same trait or behavior...and you don't like it very much.

Julia Cameron describes another specific type of toxic person in our lives:

Crazymakers. Crazymakers can show up anywhere—they can be a former boss, your sister, your brother-in-law, your neighbor, your golfing buddy...even your minister! You may be related to them by birth or by blood and you may even share a living space with them. Crazymakers thwart our dreams and plans. They create drama and confusion. They often have an air of condescension and superiority. They cause their hapless victims to doubt themselves—and we know that we already have

plenty of self-doubt, so who needs this extra layer of crazy making doubt? Mostly, though, Crazy-makers love chaos...they love it because then they can come across as being in control. Once they've laid the ground work for their chaos, they get to act as if they are above it all...and it's you who has the problem. Another good term for this kind of behavior is gas lighting...and we all know LOTS about gas-lighting in 2020 America, no?

Gas lighters and Crazy-makers love it when you make a change in your life, because during these times of change—retirement—recent surgery—a new job or move to a new house—during these times, our foundation isn't as secure as it usually is and we are prime targets for their chaos and crazy making. Here's another important things to remember—as a rule, you cannot change the behavior of the crazy maker in your life—all you can do is create boundaries and limits to the amount of chaos you are willing to allow them to make. We get to control who makes us crazy in this manner. We get to understand why our connection with the crazy-maker is so strong, and then we get to slowly expand, soothe, and mend ourselves and create the barrier and boundary that hopefully will contain the chaos. Remember, when you change the steps of your dance, sometimes your dancing partner doesn't like it.

One of the key elements in understanding our relationship to our crazy-makers is to understand what we are getting out of it. These people are gigantic distractions to the real work of our lives but the real issue is this: We then often use these distractions as an excuse to block our next creative or positive actions. We use the crazy-makers in our lives to avoid moving forward.



And don't forget that you yourself may be a crazymaker in others' lives! A big clue as to whether or not you are a crazymaker is this: Are most of your relationships volatile? Do people often tell you they are walking on eggshells around you? Do you consistently fight with the people closest to you? I'm not talking about the occasional, very-human squabble about what to cook for dinner or what to watch on TV, I'm talking about constant tension and conflict in your relationships. Is there a high level of drama in your life? Chaos and crazy making is often our excuse to stall our lives—to not move forward—to put our plans and dreams on hold. It takes deep courage and honesty to break this cycle, but one conversation at a time, one relationship at a time, one drama at a time, we can pry the crazy out of our lives and create a calmer, more purposeful existence.

So, life is complicated and life in community is even more complicated. How do we balance our desire to be authentic, honest individuals and still manage others' expectations of us? One way we can do this is by being honest with ourselves. It's time to rid our lives of toxic, Crazymakers and other wastes-of-time. It's a difficult calculus—but life is too short for you to waste time on those who don't wish the fullness of life for you. Oh, and please remember, honesty without love is useless. Always temper your honesty with an abundance of love and then you won't regret...being honest!

May the coming week bring you opportunities to practice honesty with love and may you begin to see those situations in your life where others are showing you the same.

Stay safe—and know that you are part of a beloved community that cares about you deeply.

#### RESOURCES USED

<https://juliacameronlive.com/>

Cameron, Julia “It’s Never Too Late to Begin Again: Discovering Creativity and Meaning at Midlife and Beyond” Penguin/Random House, New York, 2016