

WHAT IS KEEPING YOU FROM LIVING FULLY FOR THE THING YOU WANT TO LIVE FOR?

Unseen God, drawing all people to the end of our desires: teach us to know true bread from false and to feed on him who shares our flesh to share your love, Jesus Christ, our communion.

from *Prayers for an Inclusive Church*, Steven Shakespeare

AUGUST 8, 2021
THE ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

1 Kings 19:4-8, Psalm 34:1-8, John 6:35, 41-51

ST. MARK'S-IN-THE-VALLEY

EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND PRESCHOOL

Los Olivos, California

THE REV. RANDALL C.K. DAY, D.MIN., PRIEST AND RECTOR

MAY I SPEAK AND MAY WE HEAR FROM THE HEART OF THE LIVING GOD
WHO IS CREATING, REDEEMING, AND SANCTIFYING US.

*"But if you want to identify me, ask me not where I live, or what I like to eat, or how I comb my hair, but ask me what I think I am living for, in detail, and ask me what I think is keeping me from living fully for the thing I want to live for. Between these two answers you can determine the identity of any person. The better answer one has, the more of a person one is." (Thomas Merton, *My Argument with the Gestapo*, written 1940, published posthumously in 1969)*

Ask me what I think I am living for...

Ask me what I think is keeping me from living fully for the thing I want to live for.

These are questions that are at the heart of the gospel reading today.

So often we view Jesus religiously. But Jesus did not view himself or his life religiously. He was not in his mind or his experience "a religious figure."

He wasn't a type, a symbol, a

picture in stained glass.

Day by day by day by dusty, bloody, sweaty, hungry day, not tidied up for any religious service or observance, Jesus, himself, was living sacred purpose, living fully for what he wanted to live for, living for the life of the world.

Showing us all how to live for the life of the world.

Showing us what to want to live for...

Showing us to live for what we want to live for, and how to live fully for it.

And, yes, there was a crucifixion involved – a crucifixion that likely obscured many other smaller but probably painful crucifixions that just came along with that living....

There was constant giving up in getting over the boundaries, the subtle and not-so-subtle pushes, the coercion to be someone, something else, to step back from living fully for what he was living for.

It all came down to loving God and loving one's neighbor as oneself – doing both in action, not theoretically, without exception and at total cost. "Love is what love does" to recall that completely useful definition from bell hooks.

Merton writes: "Between these two answers you can determine the identity of any

person. The better answer one has, the more of a person one is."

Jesus had a better answer...

To put a finer point on it, because we live in a deceptive consumer culture, the better answer is not getting more stuff, getting more wealth, having more power, more control – those things, if anything are the opposite of what Jesus showed in who he was and what he did.

The better answer – the "love is what love does" answer -- is one we are all invited into, invited to live fully in the ways we, in particular can. Each of us, all of us, as long as we have one breath left, can live in this way.... that's the gospel promise, the promise of the Good News. It is unity in God.

Merton wrote those lines I've quoted as Germany willingly accepted and embraced Nazism and as the world descended into the chaos of global conflict... times different but clearly resonant with all we can see in our own chaotic times – with all the uncertainty and challenge we can sense – and all the uncertainty and challenge we can imagine lying just beyond the horizon – all of the tortured grasping for identity, the continual exploitation and degradation of human beings and the environment, the violence and destruction, the pointless and unrelenting greed....

Jesus was revealing not just *his* life – how to live in this world – but *our* life – as individuals and as a community... and how to live for the life of the world. It can't be one and done – ("Jesus did it, now I just have to go to church and think a bit about it...") no, clearly, after centuries of church going, that isn't it.

Jesus, the Christ, the Universal Christ, God, Reality are asking: what are you living for? And what do you think is keeping you from living fully for the thing you want to live for?

Remember, the better answer counts.



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