

“You can tell God what’s in your heart”

March 13, 2011

Text: Psalm 32, Matthew 4:1-11

I.

You can tell God what’s in your heart. Let me say that again: *You can tell God what’s in your heart.* One more time: *You can tell God what’s in your heart.*

My guess is that, by now, you’ve got it. ***You can tell God what’s in your heart.***

The point is: it’s important. Why? Because we’re human ... and we’ve all got our stuff—stuff left unexamined, unexpressed; stuff from our childhood, perhaps, or from a previous relationship. Stuff we need to unload, to let go of.

- stuff that makes us anxious and unsettled ...
- stuff, maybe, that we can’t bring to speech, for all kinds of reasons.

Every one of us here today has something going on in our life that falls short of our highest hopes; something that, in some way, is out of sync ... or, that causes us to be fearful; something that keeps us awake at night with worry and anxiety; something that’s the result of some over-striving, or under striving.

1. It may be a lingering health concern that has us more concerned that we want to admit.
2. It may be a persisting disappointment that just won’t go away—over our marriage, our children or grandchildren ... our career.
3. It may be a battle in our spirit where we’re tempted in one way or another to say or do something we know would not be good for us.
4. It may be a fear in our spirit that we just can’t seem to rein ourselves in and maintain ourselves more under control ... like we’re on the edge of over-reacting, of over-stating something, of being too harshly judgmental or whatever.

II.

So, the question for us on this first Sunday of Lent, is how do we live with all of this? How do we live and keep ourselves on track within our all-too-human skins?

The truth is, it’s not easy. And if it’s easy today, it may not be next week. No matter how high we rise and how pure our spirit might be today, we’re still human.

- Which means we're never beyond the need for God's forgiveness and for the compassion and love that make real forgiveness possible.
- Forgiveness doesn't just happen in an instant; it's a process. It takes time and hard work—not on God's part; on our part.

But that's what the journey of Lent is about. It's about getting us ready for Holy Week ... and for all the deep meanings and possibilities for healing and renewal the journey through Holy Week offers—

1. around the table with Jesus at the Last Supper ...
2. at the foot of the awful, tear-drenched cross of suffering and death on Good Friday ...
3. and onto the irrepressible joy and *warming of the heart* on Easter morning.

III.

From time to time, throughout my ministry, I hear people—mostly *outside* the Church—talk about how disappointed they are with the church and with the behaviors of certain church people they know. To some extent, they have a point. For sure, there are times in any church when we Christians are not at our best.

But, again, the point is: we're human. And I always wonder: who do people think they're going to find in the Church, other than humans?

We're not *in* the Church because we're perfect and evolved to where we're beyond any temptations to pride and to excesses of whatever kind. We're not *in* the church because we're somehow beyond any need of God's compassion and forgiveness.

In fact, it's all quite the contrary. We go to Church precisely because we're human and we need God's compassion and forgiveness.

Throughout the year, but particularly at Lent, we're reminded that the church, at its best, is a place where we can be fully human. That's the point of it all.

It's a place where we can bring our complete self—all of us, not just the parts of us that we like. It's the place where we can bring our worries and fears and anxieties—our rough edges and imperfections.

IV.

The message for us this morning, in all of this, is that **we can tell God what's in our hearts.** We can unload our worries ... our anxieties and fears. We can unburden ourselves of our sorrow, our regret, our guilt, or whatever it is.

Friends, there are things we need to tell God; things we need to *get rid of*, let go of and cleanse ourselves from. We all have them, on whatever level.

This doesn't mean that we are, in some way, deficient or lesser than anyone else. It simply means, we're human.

Listen to the **Psalmist** on this:

Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

***When I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long.
For day and night your hand was heavy upon me.
My strength was dried up, as by the heat of summer.***

This is what happens to us when we keep things bottled up, isn't it? When we let things fester in our spirit. Going on ...

***Then I acknowledged my sin to you,
And I did not hide my iniquity (my sin);
I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord ...
And you forgave the guilt of my sin.***

Again, **we can tell God what's in our hearts.**

V.

Friends, part of the meaning of our lives is that we're bound to *the human situation*. What does this mean?

1. What it means is that, on the one hand, we can imagine the limits of our humanity—that our lives are finite on this earth ... we don't live forever.
2. What this also means, however, is that there's part of us that rebels against this ... that doesn't want to die ... that wants to be God.
3. The name for this is *original sin*. *Original sin* is the will in all of us to be more than we can be. In other words, to NOT accept the limits of our humanity.

All the time, as human beings, we're *tempted* to try to be more than we are. Our sin, as the great American theologian **Reinhold Niebuhr** reminds us, is the sin of over-estimating our human capacities. We do it all the time ...

In the pursuit of truth ... in pursuit of power and control.

- We see this in expressions of religious fanaticism ... in the arrogant claims of religious extremists in all religions.
- We see it with *personalist dictators*, like Quaddafi, who have no concern other than absolute power.

Again, it's the sin of *over-estimating our human capacities*, of thinking we are more than we are.

The reality is: we seldom know as much as we think we know. How can we? And whatever we know, it's never the whole story. We're NOT God. Again, as human beings, we are forever over-estimating our boundaries.

Simply put, that's the human situation. In the gospel stories, we're poignantly reminded of this in the *temptations of Jesus*. Jesus, too—like us—was tempted. Of course, in the gospel writers' presentation of Jesus, he transcends the temptations before him. No surprises there.

VI.

In Matthew's version of the temptations, the Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness where he is tempted by the devil three times. He's tempted to be *more* than human and to not be bound by innately human limits.

In the third of these temptations, *the devil took Jesus to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, All these I will give you, if you fall down and worship me.*

Wow! That's some kind of temptation. However, in all of the temptations, Jesus rises above them by *taking it to God*. In our lives and in our faith journey, we're encouraged to do the same thing ... by **telling God what's in our hearts.**

The KEY for us is to do this every day so that things don't build up, whatever it is. **Take it to God. Tell God** about whatever excesses of the spirit are building up inside you.

- about whatever sadness and sorrow, whatever discouragement and darkness;
- whatever contradiction and incongruity; whatever unfairness and injustice.

In our faith journey, friends, we have to meet God half way. In ultimate faith and trust, we have to do our part. Again, the words from the Psalmist:

When I kept silence, my body wasted away ... through my groaning all day long. For day and night God's hand was heavy upon me; and my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.

*Then I revealed my sin to you ...
I confessed my internal struggle, the tension in my spirit ...
And you understood me, O God, and you forgave me ...*

Again, friends, we've all got our stuff ... our human story; and it's okay. But never forget, we're not alone.

Blessed are those whose spirit is cleansed by a letting go of their burdens ... and by taking them to God!

All praise be unto God! Amen!

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