

“Being true to your best self”
On being the person God created you to be

June 22, 2008

Text: Jeremiah 20:7-13, Matthew 10:24-39

I.

In light of this prompting text from the gospel of Matthew, Who are you and who am I? And what are our primary commitments? What is the overarching truth of our lives? And what do we do—or, need to do—every day, to live out that truth ... to be the person God created us to be?

We’re talking, this morning, about authenticity, about being authentic to our best self ... about being real and not getting all caught up in superficiality, apathy and indifference ... about not giving in to accommodation and personal compromise to the point where we no longer know who we are.

Tough stuff ... but these are tough times. There are some serious values and priorities debates going on across our nation, even as we gather this morning. And in the midst of it all, how do we, individually, be true and authentic to our best self—to the person God created us to be?

II.

Our reading from Matthew this morning bursts with the language of commitment. There’s not much wiggle room in what Jesus is saying:

Everyone who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me ... I also will deny.

Strong consequences to the choices we make. Jesus is coming after us with *commitment* language ...

Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I haven’t come to bring peace, but a sword.

This is all metaphorical, of course ... but the point is that this commitment talk is serious business. We gotta get it right ... and get our priorities in line with God’s purposes.

For I have come to set a man against his father ... and a daughter against her mother. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me ... and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

And then, the final blow: *Whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me.*

Talk about a call to authenticity—a call to be true to our best self, to our deepest, most truthful self.

I love these high commitment passages in the gospels because they shake us up.

- They awaken us to the deepest truths God has planted in our minds, hearts and spirits.
- They beckon us to the *high ground* of our life-journey/ our faith journey.

They say to us in no uncertain terms: get your priorities right ... sort out your lives. Be the person God created you to be. Don't slack off on value-commitments just because it might be easier and there might be less tension. Sometimes tension can be a good thing because it challenges us to grow ... and to wake up from our slumber.

III.

Friends, CHECK IT OUT ... If you could look back at your life from the vantage point of the end of your life. Say you're in your last days; you're a hundred-plus years old or whatever ... you're in your final days, thinking about your life. What really matters?

We all know the answer. It's got nothing to do with money ... with earthly riches ... with all of our possessions, trophies, accolades and on and on.

And it's got everything to do with LOVE ... and with the warmth and the passion we feel in our heart for our spouse, our children and our beloved friends ... what we have felt in our heart for those whom we have most loved.

I was watching the Tim Russert Memorial the other night ... a replay on MSNBC. You could just feel the deep feelings for this man ... whom I didn't know very well. *Meet the Press* is on Sunday mornings. I've got other things going on during this time slot ... and it has never occurred to me to tape it.

But the warmth and passion that Tim Russert evidently felt for his father ... and for his spouse and son were something special. As I was sitting there taking it all in ... I was thinking about how Tim Russert had apparently been true to his best self in a powerful way ...

True to his roots and to his foundational values; true to his friends ... and of course his family.

It was a compelling experience.

IV.

Tim Russert's death is but another reminder of how our lives are so short and so fleeting. In fact, the older I get, the faster the time seems to fly.

Is that your experience? I can't believe how the weeks fly by. Blink a few times and it's Thursday again, or Monday morning, or whatever it is.

Always, the gospels remind us of this sense of *urgency* to life. I don't know about you, but I can feel it. Can you feel it? The *urgency* to live today ... to get things done today.

One of my deepest fears in life is that I will wake up one day and realize that I didn't do what I was supposed to do with me life. Seriously, I have those feelings at times. Now, Yvette thinks I'm nuts, but still, there's this sense that there's only so much time.

And of course, when we're younger, we feel we have forever. But as the years unfold, forever keeps shrinking.

Part of what this suggests is that we've got to be the person God created us to be today ... right now. We've got to stand our ground for the things we believe in today. We've got to give expression to the deepest truths in our mind, heart and spirit today.

Being true to our best self ... being authentic ...

V.

The prophet **Jeremiah** certainly had this challenge. To begin with, as the prophet of gloom and doom—a calling that he in no way desired, his challenge was excruciating. Who relishes being the bearer of bad news? Very stressful activity!

Most of the biblical prophets—and this was true of Jeremiah—were from the upper class, the educated class. And so, from the outset, Jeremiah was well connected. He knew people in high places. But these were the very people he had to speak to. These people in high places were the recipients of his prophetic fire.

Because of her sinful ways—her greed, her idolatry, her insensitivity to the poor—Israel was going to be destroyed. An awful destruction was on the way. And Jeremiah had to tell them about it.

That's like trying to convince certain people today about *global warming* ... or about a way of life that is too *oil dependent* ... or about what's really involved in dealing with *global terrorism*.

The point being: there are always hard truths that *people in power* don't want to hear about.

We can only imagine Jeremiah's deep suffering and grief when he was ostracized for his *straight talk* pronouncements of imminent gloom and demise.

Jeremiah was caught in a tough, *no win* situation.

- Trying to be faithful to God and to his calling; and at the same time ...
- trying to survive in the escalating tensions of his social world. Tough times.

Being true to himself was more than hard. Listen up:

If I say, I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name (referring to God), then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I am weary with holding it in ... and I cannot.

In other words, Jeremiah wishes God would quit speaking to him ... that God would stop using him as God's messenger. For it was tearing Jeremiah up. It was ruining his life. But God's messages kept coming to Jeremiah ... and Jeremiah could not hold them back.

He can't quiet the *burning fire shut up in his bones*. And ultimately, he couldn't hold it in.

VI.

Shifting the emphasis a bit, sometimes the question becomes *how long can we keep silent on things that really matter?* Like stuff out of our past that continues to dysfunction our lives? Stuff that happened with a father, perhaps, or a mother ...

With many of us there's some level of stuff—memories ... memories that we carry around. Things that were said ... values that were imparted ... expectations that were spelled out. And we're not talking about healthy stuff ... we're talking about neurotic behaviors and values that we're laid on us.

Some of us have had parents that were neurotically self-indulgent and narcissistic.

1. For whatever reasons, they were never able to get beyond themselves, and be the parent we needed them to be.
2. The only way to seemingly please them was to somehow feed their illusions about themselves.
3. And the only way to impress them was to achieve their wild expectations about success and virtue. And it usually had something to do with money.

And of course, the reality is that—no matter what you did—you could never win; and that’s because it was a lose-lose situation from the start.

VII.

My point in all of this is that there comes a point where, the only way we’re going to get healthy is to tell the truth about our lives ... about what’s going on in our spirit. There comes a point where we have to free ourselves from all this stuff ... all these bad tapes that keep playing over in our memory and self-awareness.

Psalm 39 is helpful at this point. CHECK IT OUT!

*I was silent and still; I held my peace to no avail; my distress grew only worse,
My heart become **hot** within me. While I mused, the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue:*

**Lord, let me know my end, and what is the measure
of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is.**

In other words: tell me the truth about myself.

Sometimes, being true to our best self takes work ... and it takes courage. It asks something of us. What it asks of us is to tell the truth about our lives; tell it to ourselves ... own it ... and then begin to do something about it in ways that make things better.

When we catch a glimpse of truth about who we really are—at our best, our best self, it makes all the difference. Why? Because we’re in harmony with our essence, with who God created us to be.

And when we’re in touch with our essence, we’re free ... whole ... and alive to God’s promises.

All praise be unto God! Amen!

Dr. Jeffrey E. Frantz
Miami Lakes Congregational Church, *United Church of Christ*
6701 Miami Lakeway South
Miami Lakes, FL 33014
On the web at www.mlchurch.com