

April 28, 2024

Pr. Steve

Texts: 1 John 4: 7-21; John 15: 1-8.??

In the name of God, Abba/Imma, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

*Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "It is said that in Christianity the crucial point is that the hope of the Resurrection is proclaimed. And in this way, we are to receive relief from all the cares of this world. The emphasis tends to fall on what is beyond the boundary of the grave, and I think this is a very clear error and danger. Easter Resurrection does not mean redemption from the cares, and needs, and anxieties, and burdens, and longings of this world to attain a better beyond. Is that really what you think? Is the essence of the proclamation of Christ in the Gospels, or in Paul? I don't think so. The Christian hope of the Resurrection points humankind in the direction of life on this Earth. Christians do not have a last escape from earthly tasks and duties. Rather, we are invited to completely enjoy and engage this earthly life as Christ did. Only when we do this will the crucified and resurrected One be with us. Only when we do this will we be crucified and resurrected with Christ. The present age must not be prematurely abolished. We're not getting out of here without loving life—as it is. On this, Jews and Christians agree. We are not an 'after post-boundary experience'. Christ, rather, meets us in the middle of our lives, right here and now."*

Bonhoeffer paid for that with his life. That's what it is to love. The only way to come into the Beloved Community and the presence of God is the avenue of Love. *Only those whose hearts are filled with love can see this world as a place of love.* Love is real. Love is reality. Isn't that an outrageous claim from the Gospels? Loving is reality. This is not just effective (affective?) and emotional loving, this is the grounded experience of well-being in this life, which wants to encourage the well-being of everyone else, and every dimension of this creation.

Love one another. We were made by love. We were made through love. We were made to love. We were made for love. But we are creatures of contradiction, and we betray love, and we reject love even though we want it desperately for ourselves. *'Sometimes, you know, you just can't love people. You know what I'm talking about, right? I mean there are limits, aren't there? How far can you go loving other people?'*

We can love and hate at the same time, can't we? (You know that inside yourself? Have you ever come across that?) We can love and be envious; we can love and be greedy; we can love and lust; we can love and fear all at the same time.

Did you hear that passage in the text, *"But perfect love casts out all fear."* [1 John: 4:18] That's where we need to go. That's where we are already drawn. We all want it, but we aren't sure. 'What kind of price do we have to pay if we're going to love that openly and generously?'

So, we turn love into a struggle. And that's us. It's a project—*love is demanding, and I'm going to practice it no matter what. (Try me, Jim. Going to take me on there, Frank?) We're going to love because we're supposed to love, right? We treat it like a command, but it's ridiculous. It's just ridiculous. The mystics have known that for centuries. The mystics know that there is only loving.*

St. John in that passage, cherry blossoms, right? [reference to a family experience in Golden Gate park when Pr. Steve put his toddler son in a cherry tree in bloom], just layer after layer like who can fight with love nobody stood up and said, "Stop that, right? Maybe that's too much. We're going to love like that? No, we want it. We just aren't sure if we're ready for it.

And so we turn it into this battle—of good people and evil people, of virtuous people went violent, or people filled advice. We want that battle to go on because that we understand, alright.? But the mystics say, *'Just love it all. Just love the mess. Love who you are. Love folks as they are.'* Oh, that is the pureness of the generosity of God's love for us, but we're not sure we can really go there, right—to open ourselves that wide, with that expansiveness of heart.

What are good persons, but bad persons' teachers?

What are bad persons but good persons' jobs?

Can I get an Amen?

All we need is love. Only God who is love. As John also says *"God can only be known by loving—only be known by loving."* It's as if we never hear that sentence from the Bible, isn't it? God [who] can only be known by loving, pours out that love on us, and invites us into that expansiveness of heart, encouraging the well-being of others.

As the sun and the rain are poured out on the happy and the wicked alike, so we are invited to love indiscriminately unconditionally. *'Don't make me go there!'*

Could these gardens have grown without love? *'I hate flowers, so I'm going to be a gardener. Do any of the flowers say, 'look at me? I'm the only one here. I need more water. Give me more space.'* No, they rejoice in the life they've been given, with all the other friends.

Can we? That requires a melting of our hearts, right? For the flowers there's no choice. They just grow into it, but we get to choose, and that's the edge. That's the edge why Jesus says remain in me as I remain in you and I remaining God and we three are remaining in each other. I am the vine, you are the branches, stay connected so you can get that tap root of way down, deep, transforming love which would invite us to love as freely as God.

When virtuousness happens, it's just free-flowing love—that's all—when you've participated in loving somebody else, nobody ever stands up and says, 'I really love somebody today, what do you think?' No, because we're happy from the inside. We are doing what is most natural, deepest in our own nature. We want to participate. Love is reality.

Can we open ourselves to move in that direction? And violence, and vice, and all these terrible things—the mystics say, *'Now that's just feeble love'*. You know, Gloria's still working on it. She can't help it.' But we need to encourage her, to enable, to strengthen, to build, to support. Yeah, it's just feeble love. Give it a chance because these vulnerable places are the points of transformation—are life. We can turn and become somebody new, if we allow them to be.

The only way to enter the Beloved Community, and the fullness of God's presence, is to love. *"Only those whose hearts are filled with love will see this world as filled with love."* [1 John 4:

Amen.

The peace which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts in Christ Jesus' love. Amen.