

The best connections are secured by Love.

Loving God, help us to hear Your words of love this day so that we might sow seeds of love in our world. And assist us we pray – that the words of my mouth and the mediations of all our hearts are pleasing to You – our Healer, our Liberator, our Redeemer. AMEN.

It is a question that has been asked in various forms by people from the beginning – Where do I fit in?

Sometimes the question is asked in these ways – “Where do I come from?” or “Who are my people?” or “Where is my home?”

However, it is asked . . . the reality for us humans is that we are social beings. There are very few, if any, true loners in our world. Whether we like it or not – we are designed to be connected with others.

Sure, there might be times when we are associated or connected to people we want separation from – people who have harmed us; people who have beliefs and attitudes that don’t align with our values or the way we choose to live out our lives.

But there are times when we want to be associated or connected to people – so that we are not alone . . . so that we can feel we are part of something bigger than ourselves.

Sometimes the connection is temporary – like sports fans cheering on their team during the game . . . while the game is on – the connection is real. Yet, once the game is over and people go their separate ways – there really isn’t a true sense of loss at losing the connection.

For we all know, deep down inside, that the most important connections . . . the ones we value most . . . are connections that last. They are connections that make us feel at home . . . connections that bring us a sense of belonging . . . connections that allow us to be free to be fully ourselves.

Sometimes the connection we have with others seems to occur naturally with very little effort. Sometimes creating the connection seems like more work than it might be worth. And sometimes the connection we long for seems almost impossible to achieve.

You see, deep connection is what we all long for. Yet, it can be one of the most elusive things to obtain in our lives. Why?

Because deep connection involves people who are constantly changing making the connection something that is dynamic – meaning that to maintain the connection everyone involved must be willing to make adjustments based on the changes that take place over time.

This means that deep connection . . . requires us to be open and vulnerable. It requires us to be not only self-aware but aware of the needs and desires of the other person or group as well.

And any time we make ourselves open and vulnerable – there is a risk . . . a big risk of being hurt, of experiencing pain, of being disappointed or even worse being discarded.

Of course, there is another word for ‘deep connection’ . . . it is relationship. And while there are many different levels of relationship in our lives – the most meaningful relationships are the ones where we are open and vulnerable, where we are tuned into the needs and desires of the other, where we are working to grow more fully into maturity, where we never take the connection are granted!

In today’s reading from Exodus, we encounter a classic example of how relationships can change over time.

Joseph's relationship to the ruler of Egypt – Pharaoh – had ensured that his family had been received kindly as refugees. After Joseph died – his family remained in Egypt for a long time.

In fact, by the time Moses comes into the picture the Israelites have been in Egypt for more than 130 years. Joseph has been dead for over 60 years. There is a new Pharaoh – who treats the Israelites not as refugees or immigrants but as foreigners who can be exploited and abused. They have moved from being honoured guests to slaves.

For the connection – the relationship – between the Israelites and the Egyptians changed with the death of Joseph. Instead of partnership – instead of friendship – the relationship was only seen through the eyes of suspicion and fear. The heart of the new king was hardened – he only saw the Israelites as a commodity to use to strengthen his hold on power. For he declared:

“Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.” (Exodus 1:9-10)

If a relationship is not seen as mutual – if a relationship is seen as only a way to get what you want . . . then it will always be about power instead of love . . . it will always be about domination instead of equality and freedom.

The Egyptians went so far as to try to get those they were oppressing to kill their own newborns – for the Egyptians no longer saw the Israelites as people – only objects to be used. And when that didn't work – Pharaoh commanded his people to kill. He tells the people:

“Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live.” (Exodus 1:22)

And so it will be with any connection – any relationship – we enter into. If we are only looking for what we can get out of it . . . only looking to exploit the other for our own gain . . . then it will never turn out well for us or the other.

Fortunately, there is always a choice for us to make. We can choose to go with the crowds so that we fit in . . . or we can choose a different path.

When the baby – who was to be called Moses – could no longer be hidden – his mother devised a plan to at least give him a chance to live. By placing him in the river near where Egyptians bathed – she trusted that someone would have mercy on the helpless baby.

But there was no way that the mother knew that Pharaoh's daughter would disobey the orders of Pharaoh. Yet, that is what happened. Why?

Connection. Somehow seeing the baby caused Pharaoh's daughter to risk the wrath of her father. We are told:

She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him.
(Exodus 2:6)

This scene should remind us – that we always have a choice; we always have the opportunity to enter into deep connection . . . into relationship.

For this is what Jesus did – all the time. Jesus invited people into deeper connection through his stories, through his actions . . . by his love.

In today's gospel, we heard Jesus asking his closest followers who people thought he was. The people knew Jesus was special – knew Jesus was different than other teachers . . . but were not connected enough to know the whole story.

Jesus then asked those who deeply knew him . . . those who had been by his side . . . who they thought he was. Remember Jesus had been open and vulnerable with them pouring his life into their lives.

So, maybe it shouldn't be surprising that Peter – as the spokesperson for the disciples – made this astounding claim:

“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” (Matthew 16:16)

It sounds so enlightened . . . so far beyond what the crowds thought. But perhaps it was a natural response – because of connection . . . deep connection with Jesus.

Then Jesus made an equally astounding statement:

“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”
(Matthew 16:18-19)

Jesus declared that Peter’s connection with God would result in amazing things taking place through Peter. Why? Because when one is open and vulnerable to God – God’s love flows through them into the world.

But did you notice any thing else of significance in Jesus’ words?

The one connected to Jesus was no longer to be called “Simon” but “Peter”. He was given a new identity . . . an identity that would take Peter a lifetime to live into completely.

And this is what Paul is telling all believers in the passage from the book of Romans that was read earlier.

To completely ‘fit in’ to what God has instore for us . . . we must be open and vulnerable . . . we must be willing to set aside the urge to put ourselves first . . . we must be willing to allow God’s love to flow through us.

When Paul states:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.
(Romans 12:1-2)

Paul is reminding us that we are called to place our trust in God by thinking as God thinks . . . not as the world thinks.

For the world tells us that we need to ensure that we come out ahead in every relationship . . . that we need to profit from every encounter . . . that we need to be exploit and use in order to achieve success.

But God only desires – God only needs – us to having open hearts. Then we will fit in. For God calls us to use the gifts given to us – not to exploit but to assist everyone in becoming who they were created to be.

When declaring that:

For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. (Romans 12:4-5)

Paul is reminding us that there is a place for each of us – there is a place in God's family for everyone. For we fit in because we are loved fully – right now.

And we are called to share that love. We are called to welcome all . . . believing that there is a place for all. But it is more than just welcome . . . we need to be brave enough to be open and vulnerable knowing that as we are transformed by love – others will be transformed too.

You see, the only thing that makes any connection permanent is God's love. So, may we be brave enough to embrace love in ways that will transform us and our world.

AMEN.