

Gospel – John 14:23-29

²³Jesus answered him, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

²⁵I have said these things to you while I am still with you. ²⁶But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. ²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. ²⁸You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. ²⁹And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe

P: The gospel of our Lord.

C: Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon



WHO ARE WE?

January 29th, 2023 – RIC Sunday

You are worthy.

In exactly the way that God is continually working creation in you.

You are already a whole person.

We are never one thing. We are never the totality of one descriptor. We are, each of us, a multiplicity and intersection, a spectrum – if you will, of an untold number of traits and personality and identities and expressions. The seasons of our lives take every single one of us through some kind of metamorphosis.

Some of those transformations are apparent to everyone.

Some of those revisions are only visible as you present them to the world.

Some of those re-formations are only known to God.

All of who we were, are, and will be is loved by God.

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**This** truth is probably why I have sometimes actively and sometimes quietly rebelled against labels my whole life. I recognize that labels can be helpful for some people in creating a clear vision of their own identity. So I don't want to minimize what can be solid ground and safe boundaries for some people. The tension here is that I am compelled to say that what is helpful for some is not always helpful for all.

Because labels can be harmfully subjective.

Labels, especially of someone else's making, can make us question who we are.

Labels, especially of someone else's making, often come with a connotation that you aren't *actually* a real version of who you think you are.

Labels can become boxes of identity that trap and hold captive rather than making space for the diversity of God's constant creating. Especially when we aren't sure of who we are, or if we fixate on who we think people think we should be.

The beauty of what God has done and is doing throughout this abundance of diversity and variety and multiplicity and intersectionality in creation is freedom.

Freedom to stop being who we think the people around us think we should be.

Freedom to love ourselves and stop being who we aren't.

Freedom to being open to discovering who God is creating us to be and calling us to be in the world.

Freedom for us to see how God is working around / in / through each of us – and each of the people we encounter as we live and work and study and play in the world of God's constant creating.

Freedom to being loved as a whole person. Right now. Without qualification.

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ReconcilingWorks has been around for 40 years.

St Mark's became a Reconciling in Christ Partner 5 years ago.

I cannot begin to list the things that the people of St Mark's have lived into and done in those five years.

Mainly because I haven't been here.

But, one year ago, I stood in this very spot, telling you why it was so important to me that you were an RIC partner. I shared with you what it would mean for me, a queer pastor, to be with you in such a place. Thankfully, I won't have to go through that on-the-spot kind of questioning again because ... here we are, three-quarters of the way through our first year together in ministry. And, what a year. The last nine months have shown me some things that I really truly appreciate about this congregation's identity as an RIC partner.

And one of the things that we recognize is that the holy work of being RIC is more than just a checking the list of steps to get us there.

It is recognition and actualization that there are always new ways we can be deepening and expanding in our own living and learning to meet up with and journey along with the diverse and intersectional experience of people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions while ALSO celebrating and advocating for people of all ability, neurodiversity, racial identity and expression. It is about creating inviting, welcoming, validating, and I cannot stress this enough – **safe** – space within our faith community so that everyone who enters feels seen, heard, and cared for.

Much like the work of God's constant creating all around us, this work of living into the identity of being RIC is never completed.

There will always be an opportunity for our own understanding and hearts to be broken open to the ways that we perpetuate harm and

risk in the families, friend circles, faith groups, neighbourhoods and world around us.

The works of reconciliation and reformation are about opening ourselves to God's truth and allowing the peace of Christ to work wholeness in through and around each person. This work is about the freedom that comes in the identity as a member of the body of Christ. It is a continuous action of faith and what it means to listen to Jesus' word and hear what Jesus has shared with the world.

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There will always be someone in the midst of us who doesn't feel whole.

Who isn't seen, heard, or believed and loved as who they see themselves to be.

Who is struggling with who they want to be.

It is for us to declare that every single person is worthy. Is loved. Is whole. As they are.

It is for us to testify that in the waters of baptism God claimed us and called each of us by our true name.

It is for us to confess that we are called by God, through the waters of baptism, to be our authentic selves.

It is for us to reveal that through baptism into the body of Christ, God transformed our lives and made us whole.

When we hear this truth, ingest this truth, allow this truth to tear down the walls of our ignorance, our privilege, our judgements, and the ways that we label the people around us, we are freed and can turn again to the work of being disciples of Christ.

This too, much like our own identities, is an ever-evolving, life-transforming, oscillation in the intersection of being both and: the push pull of saintedness and sinfulness. We are far more complex than we give ourselves credit for being sometimes. We are what God creates in and through us, and we are stubbornly trying to wrest control, create labels and categories, and trying to make something far beyond our understanding fit into easily identifiable boxes.

So, as simply as I can put it:

You are worthy.

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We are, each of us, a multiplicity and intersection, a spectrum – if you will, of an untold number of traits and personality and identities and expressions. The seasons of our lives take every single one of us through some kind of metamorphosis.

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This is most certainly true. Amen.

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