

“TRANSGRESSIVE LOVE” (12/20/09)

SCRIPTURES: Hebrews 10: 5-10 & Luke 1: 39-55

KEY CONCEPTS: Love often must transgress societal norms, dominant cultures, religious dogma & a host of agendas that tell it “no” in order to create a “greater good”.

OPENING ILLUSTRATION:

I had an interesting experience at this past Friday’s Undergraduate Commencement ceremony. The University of Georgia Commencement planners typically invite a local pastor &/or a member of the Campus Ministry Association to lead the invocation. The primary requirements for the person leading the invocation are:

- 2-3 minutes in length
- Non-denominational, non-sectarian
- Inclusive of the diverse student body, families & those in attendance

So, when I accepted this invitation from Dr. Alan Campbell back in August, it seemed like an easy task. However, as you may know...it takes some time to create an inclusive prayer; a meaningful invocation.

For you see, sometimes, when you’re the majority religion or the dominant culture—like how Christianity is—here in the southern United States, it’s often easy to overlook our country’s rich heritage of religious freedom, much less allow for & even embrace it.

Additionally, on this the 4th & final Sunday of Advent, we often overlook & forget that Jesus—though Jewish—was outside the dominant religious & societal norms of his day. Thankfully, Mary, Joseph & God’s love transgressed society, culture & an entire host of political & religious agendas to birth a Child born in a stable! And for this we can be grateful!

WILL YOU PRAY WITH ME?

PRAYER:

THE TERM “TRANSGRESSIVE”:

The word “transgress” is a verb that most often means

- “To violate a command or law”, to sin.
- “To go beyond a boundary or limit.”—set by a predetermined law or authority
- To pass beyond or go over

Since we’ve mostly known the word, “transgress or transgression” in mostly a negative connotation, I thought it might be important to define what I mean by “transgressive love”. I use the term “transgressive” deliberately to describe the “violating, going beyond, going over or moving beyond” any unjust & oppressive action or behavior of one person toward another.

And as the Wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible states (in Ecclesiastes 3), there is a time & season for everything under the sun...sometimes we are to submit to not only God’s laws of love as well as man made laws of our land. AND sometimes it’s the season to transgress unjust & oppressive man made laws. Transgressing a law must be for the betterment of others, not merely a rebellion of a person unwilling to follow the law.

THE NEED TO TRANSGRESS AT TIMES: (Online Reading)

Many of the laws of God AND laws of this land are for our own good & for the well being of humanity. However, there ARE some unjust laws that need to be broken...

- Just ask people who have been denied housing because of the color of their skin
- Just ask people who have lost their jobs due to ageism

- Just ask people who have been denied the right to see a life partner in a hospital because they were GLBTQ

Yes, many of our country's laws are fine laws that should be obeyed by the entire citizenry. AND there are some unjust laws still in our land that prohibit "all citizens being created equal".

EPISTLE READING—HEBREWS 10: 5-10:

According to Hebrews, chapter 10, Christ came, not for ritual sacrifices—which was a part of the Jewish system of covering sin (transgression)—but rather for an offering, a sacrifice of our lives for the good of God's will. Christ came, I believe, to embody how a fully surrendered human life would look—given to God.

Christ came not to "keep score" but rather "keep us". Jesus Christ offered "a higher possibility" for all of us. To love God in our hearts, in our minds, through our actions, words & daily lives.

GOSPEL READING—LUKE 1: 39-55:

And yet before Jesus could live an exemplary life, it was all hands on deck just to get him onto this earth! In today's reading, Mary, the mother of Jesus, has left her hometown to go & visit Elizabeth who is pregnant with John. Upon Mary's arrival, Elizabeth was "filled with the Spirit" & proclaims a blessing on both Mary & the Baby Jesus. Mary's response to "being with child" is recorded as a song, *The Magnificat* (Luke 1: 46-55).

Today's reading is one of the shining examples/accounts of a high & holy moment in Mary's pregnancy. However, not all of her pregnancy was easy. For according to Jewish law, Joseph could have had Mary stoned for being pregnant. He could have definitely broken off their engagement (which he had planned to do) until "the angel of the Lord" appeared to him. (Matthew 1: 18-25).

If Joseph had not "transgressed the Jewish law"...Mary & Baby Jesus would have died! Sometimes laws need to be broken....And what about the transgressive love of God, who will go to any length to draw us each one unto God's self.

And how many of us here today are willing to allow God to transgress—to break into our plans, to ask more of us in this upcoming New Year—in order to benefit others in this faith community or in our larger community?

INVOCATION ILLUSTRATION:

Oh yes...one more thing about the Friday Commencement ceremony. Following several days of work, I finally found what I thought God might want me to say in the 2 minute invocation. In honoring the UGA guidelines (& after having read today's Gospel reading & several resource books)...I thought the best approach was to use the term "Spirit" to refer to God. For the Spirit of God was present with Mary, with Elizabeth, with John the Baptizer, with Joseph...well, you get my point....so when one wants to INVOKE (to invite, acknowledge & call forth)...it seems like to me—Invoking the Spirit—is a wise decision!

So...I did. I called on God as:

- *Spirit of Light & Love*
- *Spirit of Community & All Humanity*
- *Spirit of the Past, Present & Future*

And this gave me a perspective. I used the exact same prayer for both the Undergraduate & the Graduate Commencements. And at the end of the invocation prayer at the early (Undergraduate) ceremony...from way up in the upper deck someone faintly yelled something like, "**What about God?**"

Then following the 2nd Commencement (Graduate), 2 different deans/professors specifically thanked me for being a Christian yet praying inclusively.

"SAY MY NAME":

So, upon reflection of Friday's events & responses here what I realized, God isn't concerned like Destiny's Child who implored (or demanded) their lover to "*Say My Name, Say My Name*".

Rather God calls on us to "live into being called mature children of God" in order that the world might witness the transformation of love in our lives, through our lives & because of our lives.

Love often must transgress societal norms, dominant cultures, religious dogma & a host of agendas that tell it "no" in order to create a "greater good".

Transgressive love, used properly will slowly, (like leaven & light) yet surely change our lives & the lives of those around us. The Baby we celebrate—one tiny baby—radically changed the lives of the characters in today's reading. And He continues to change lives even today over 2,000 years later.