

**DON'T TELL ME HOW TO FEEL**  
**TRINITY SUNDAY – JUNE 7, 2020**  
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One morning back 40 or so years ago, when I'd been in the adult work force for about 2 weeks, I went into work on the 16<sup>th</sup> floor of a 41-story downtown office building.

I needed to talk to my boss, Judy, about my assignment, and knocked on her closed door.

Judy told me to come in; it was clear she had been crying.

She motioned me to sit down while she got a Kleenex. A crying boss is . . . awkward.

I'm maybe 25 years old, and I said the first thing that came to my young head:

"Don't be sad, don't cry. I'm sure it will be OK."

Judy glared over at me and spit out words that stunned me: "Don't tell me how to feel."

Chagrined, I said nothing. I asked my questions, she answered them, I left.

I thought about her words: "Don't tell me how to feel."

How right she was. I had no idea what was going on in her life, did I?

Had she been fired? had a miscarriage? gotten in an accident? I had no idea.

I thought about the other thing I said to Judy,

"I'm sure it will be OK." This was not only pure ignorance on my part, since whatever made her cry might not ever be OK – I didn't know – my motivation had NOT been to make Judy feel better.

The person I was taking care of was me. Like I said, a crying boss is very awkward.

So, I took care of me by blowing her emotions off.

Judy, with those 6 words, "Don't tell me how to feel,"

taught me more about human relationships than in my 4 years of college psychology classes.

We DON'T know what's going on with other people's lives.

We DON'T know what it's like FOR them, or what it's like to BE them.

All we can possibly know is what WE are feeling.

When we feel like things are awkward, or frightening, or we just don't understand, we feel afraid or anxious. We DON'T LIKE to feel afraid or anxious.

So often, so very, very often, we just say or do whatever we can to make OURSELVES feel better.

Let's take my benign, simple, sanitary little story and explore the implications in a world where there is, in a pretty classic understatement, a LOT of fear and anxiety going around.

Not one of us wants a world where the daily reality is pandemic, protests, and political polarization.

Especially we white people are very, very anxious.

To take care of ourselves, we tell people of color

what we've told them for century after century after century:

"Stop being sad, stop crying, everything will be OK."

They are telling us whites, they are telling me: DON'T TELL ME HOW TO FEEL.

Just like that morning 41 years ago, they are right:

I DON'T know what it is like to be a person of color, Black or Brown, in America. I haven't a clue.

The other thing we all do to feel better is to say, "Hey, that's happened to me, too,"

and we shove off the other person's problems by talking about ours.

So, yes, I've had my issues with discrimination. Sure.

But not because of the color of my skin. I have not had that experience.

So when we white people start making comparisons between our problems and a black person's, we're shutting them down, shutting them up,

because we do not want to hear about their problems.

The third thing we do is deny of the legitimacy of another's reality by saying "Yeah, but. . . ." and then throw out some other event or "fact"

that is supposed to make the other's position indefensible.

Whenever someone says "Yeah, but . . . ." they've stopped listening and are once again attempting to reduce their own fear and anxiety by dismissing another person's feelings.

The best example is the statement *Black Lives Matter*.

Immediately, to contain our fear and discomfort, we whites counter with "Yeah, but . . . ALL lives matter!"

As true as this is, it's not the point AND WE KNOW IT.

*Black Lives Matter* is a cry of despair and frustration about a reality of systemic bigotry and centuries of oppression that needs to be dismantled, and which an awful lot of whites just don't want to deal with because deep down we believe that if everyone really is truly equal life will be less wonderful for us.

Today, people of color are asking us whites to please, just listen.

Just listen to what it's like for them, day in and day out.

Listen, and when we get defensive and uncomfortable, just stay quiet.

This isn't about us and our anxiety. It's about them and their reality.

Don't tell anyone else how to feel.

Don't tell anyone else everything all be OK.

Don't tell them anything at all. Listen.

Consider that the Commissioner of the NFL, Roger Goodell says the league was wrong for not listening to Black players.<sup>1</sup>

The other big player in the unrest and protests in our country right now is law enforcement: civil authority and its uses and abuses.

Now, I've been a prosecutor, but I readily admit I DON'T know what it's like

to be on the front lines as a police officer, a deputy. I do know that can be very dangerous work.

Someone I respect very much, and whose entire family I love,

has shown me that law enforcement can be both effective and compassionate.

Wayne Morris, a member of this parish, and a now-retired major

from the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office, taught me this some 8 years ago

when I took part in the Sheriff's Office Citizens Academy.

There, I heard Wayne talk about how he trained new deputies,

and I asked him to share what he said with the entire congregation

because his entire approach and attitude was a shining example

of how our Christian discipleship and living into our baptismal vows

can inform how any profession is lived out, including policing.

Wayne said he taught trainees in the sheriff's office to treat people in trouble with the law with as much dignity and respect as they possibly could.

Even when arresting someone, he said, the way the deputy acted

"should be the best part of somebody's worst day."

Yes. Instead of an attitude "casual cruelty"<sup>2</sup> just because they are the authorities, law enforcement officers are to be both human and humane.

<sup>1</sup> *Goodell: NFL was wrong on protests*, Tampa Bay Times, June 6, 2020, p. A13

<sup>2</sup> *Suspensions after man, 75, shoved to ground*, By John Wawrow, AP. Tampa Bay Times, June 6, 2020, p. A12.

After the story of George Floyd broke a couple of weeks ago,  
four top local law enforcement leaders from the Bay area all strongly denounced the tactics  
used by the officer now charged with murdering Mr. Floyd.<sup>3</sup>

Framing what is going on as a battle between good cops and bad blacks  
is a tactic to reduce our white anxiety, to preserve our sense of safety.  
It is not reality.

Now, I've said that when we don't understand someone else's reality,  
we need to be quiet, not tell them how to feel or that everything will be OK.  
But that doesn't apply to telling the truth to ourselves.

What I admire about Mr. Goodell and those four top cops  
is that they broke the silence and, using their positions of authority,  
they told the truth, not to those who suffer,  
but to those of us in their group, those of us who are, in fact, OK.  
(One of those top cops is black, but he is someone with a LOT of authority.)  
They spoke out against the casual cruelty, the abuse, the indignity,  
and are taking seriously the reality of those who suffer.

As Christians, as we gaze unflinchingly at the reality of our culture,  
we must consider what Scripture has to say about what we should do.

On this Trinity Sunday, the first thing we need to remember is that  
Jesus is the fullness of God and came to dwell as a human, born of a woman.

The incarnation of God in Christ is an emphatic affirmation  
that every human being is made in the image and likeness of God,  
each of us just a little lower than the angels,  
and God is mindful of each one of us, of every land, color and tribe.

The Holy Spirit is within every person on the planet,  
coming in with every breath that every human being breathes.

Most of all, through this indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and unlike us,  
God DOES know what it's like to be me, and to be you;  
to be Black, and to be White; to be male, and to be female;  
to be American and to be Chinese, Italian, or Fijian.

In Ephesians, we listen to how Christ has ALREADY made us all, Jews and Gentiles  
(which means Jews and EVERYONE else), into one group,  
reconciling two groups into one body, breaking down the barriers of hatred,  
when he *stretched out [his] arms on the hard wood of the cross,*  
*that EVERYONE might come within the reach of [his] saving embrace.*<sup>4</sup>

Everyone! How did the first reading from Psalm 148 describe it?

*kings of the earth and every single person, princes and every single ruler,*  
*young men and young women, too, you who are old together with you who are young.*

In the Gospel, Jesus sends his followers out with messages.

He sent the women to the men to tell them to stop hiding and follow Jesus.

He sent the disciples (and hence, through their legacy, all of us)  
to all the nations to teach everyone to obey Jesus' commandments.

What were Jesus' commandments? Love God. Love your neighbor. Love yourself. Love each other.  
Serve the poor, feed the hungry. Serve each other. Don't retaliate or seek revenge.

Put away your sword. Pray for your enemies. Give your peace.

Do to others as you would have them do to you. Forgive each other as God has forgiven you –  
70 times a day, if needed. Be perfect like your heavenly Father.

And, my absolute personal favorite: Don't judge each other.

<sup>3</sup> *Condemnation the right message*, Editorial, Tampa Bay Times, May 30, 2020, p. A18

<sup>4</sup> *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 100

There is one commandment that Jesus gives to his disciples over and over and over again, in every Gospel, nearly two dozen times: LISTEN. Listen to God, listen to each other.

The good news is that to obey these commandments,  
to teach them to a world that's crying out in despair,  
we don't need any new equipment, or even buildings;  
we don't need to do anything that we aren't already equipped to do,  
because the only equipment we need is already attached to our bodies:  
two ears to listen to our neighbors,  
one mouth to teach of the love of God to all the world,  
two hands and two feet to serve those who suffer.

God's promise is that when we do God's will on earth as it is done in heaven,  
when we take the equipment God has given to each one of us and we use it as God intended –  
which means living out the commandments of love that Jesus gave us –  
Christ will build all creation into a place where God lives through the Spirit,  
and we will – all of us, everyone –  
know the endless joy and love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
our one God and our peace.

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#### COLLECT OF THE DAY:

Almighty Creator and ever-living God: we worship your glory, eternal Three-in-One, and we praise your power, majestic One-in-Three. Keep us steadfast in this faith, defend us in all adversity, and bring us at last into your presence, where you live in endless joy and love, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

#### PSALM 148:1-13

Praise the Lord from heaven! Praise God on the heights! Praise God, all of you who are his messengers! Praise God, all of you who comprise his heavenly forces! Sun and moon, praise God! All of you bright stars, praise God! You highest heaven, praise God! Do the same, you waters that are above the sky! Let all of these praise the Lord's name because God gave the command and they were created! God set them in place always and forever. God made a law that will not be broken.

Praise the Lord from the earth, you sea monsters and all you ocean depths! Do the same, fire and hail, snow and smoke, stormy wind that does what God says! Do the same, you mountains, every single hill, fruit trees, and every single cedar! Do the same, you animals—wild or tame—you creatures that creep along and you birds that fly! Do the same, you kings of the earth and every single person, you princes and every single ruler on earth! Do the same, you young men—young women too!— you who are old together with you who are young! Let all of these praise the Lord's name because only God's name is high over all. Only God's majesty is over earth and heaven.

#### PSALM 8

O LORD our Governor, how exalted is your Name in all the world!

**Out of the mouths of infants and children your majesty is praised above the heavens.**

You have set up a stronghold against your adversaries, to quell the enemy and the avenger.

**When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars you have set in their courses,**

What is man that you should be mindful of him? the son of man that you should seek him out?

**You have made him but little lower than the angels; you adorn him with glory and honor;**

You give him mastery over the works of your hands; you put all things under his feet:

**All sheep and oxen, even the wild beasts of the field,**

The birds of the air, the fish of the sea, and whatsoever walks in the paths of the sea.

**O LORD our Governor, how exalted is your Name in all the world!**

#### EPHESIANS 2:14-22

Christ is our peace. He made both Jews and Gentiles into one group. With his body, he broke down the barrier of hatred that divided us. He canceled the detailed rules of the Law so that he could create one new person out of the two groups, making peace. He reconciled them both as one body to God by the cross, which ended the hostility to God.

When he came, he announced the good news of peace to you who were far away from God and to those who were near. We both have access to the Father through Christ by the one Spirit. So now you are no longer strangers and aliens. Rather, you are fellow citizens with God's people, and you belong to God's household. As God's household, you are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. The whole building is joined together in him, and it grows up into a temple that is dedicated to the Lord. Christ is building you into a place where God lives through the Spirit.

**MATTHEW 28:1,5-10,16-20**

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the tomb. But the angel said to the women, "Don't be afraid. I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He isn't here, because he's been raised from the dead, just as he said. Come, see the place where they laid him. Now hurry, go and tell his disciples, 'He's been raised from the dead. He's going on ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there.' I've given the message to you." With great fear and excitement, they hurried away from the tomb and ran to tell his disciples. But Jesus met them and greeted them. They came and grabbed his feet and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Don't be afraid. Go and tell my brothers that I am going into Galilee. They will see me there."

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. Jesus came near and spoke to them, "I've received all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I've commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age."

**SERMON HYMN:** *Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee*

**BLESSING:** Live without fear: your Creator has made you holy, has always protected you, and loves you unconditionally. Go in peace to follow the Way of Jesus, and as you journey, the blessing of our Triune God, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, be with you now and always.