

November 20, 2022
 Remember Me—The Genuine Me
 Luke 23:33-43
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 Visiting: Church of the Messiah, Detroit

May the God who Creates us...

Good Morning!

Theologian Howard Thurman, African American Theologian, Howard Thurman said to a class of graduating women at Spellman College in May of 1980— he said, in order for them to thrive they were going to need to *“Hear the sound of genuine in themselves.”* It didn’t matter so much what the young women were going to do, or who the young women were going to be in their lives, what mattered more was them knowing, then and there, who they were. *“Who are you?”* Knowing and claiming who you genuinely are, will determine everything that is to come—including who they might be and what they might go on to do. *The Sound of the Genuine.*

In that sermon Thurman said to the women of Spellman College, [mostly African American Women] in 1980,

“Nobody like you has ever been born...And no one like you will ever be born again. You are the only one. And if you miss the sound of genuine in you, you will be [limited] a cripple the rest of your life.” (Thurman, May 4, 1980 Spellman College)

Friends, scripture tells us (Gen 1:26-28) that we are each made in God’s image and likeness. God is in the marrow of our bones, and the synapses of our souls. You, you, each of you, me, each of us the flawed, frail, fragile people that we are, we are made in God’s image and likeness, and we are good.

We are good enough. If you can hear nothing else today, I’d like for you to hear and know this biblical and theological truth. You are of God, just as you are, and you are good enough. God is in you. Are you perfect. Probably not. Speaking for myself, I’m definitely not. But that’s ok.

Here’s the next truth I’d like you to consider: Each of us has been given unique gifts and talents that God longs for us to use, to hone, to develop, to share, to join with Christ, in creating a new Heaven and a new Earth. In John’s Gospel, the night before he died, Jesus said to his disciples, *“Very truly I tell you the one who believes in me will do the works that I do, and in fact will do greater works than these. (John 14:12)* We are offered the opportunity, by Jesus to do even greater works...

We who are people of faith, or people who want to be people of faith, if only we didn’t doubt so much, we are called by Jesus to use our gifts, and our quirks to help this world live into the Kingdom of God, that Jesus tells us is at hand. You and me, us, all of us.

How we do this, knowing we are of God, using our unique gifts, to do amazing things, this I believe is our call. This then is the sound of the Genuine that the Rev. Howard Thurman held so dear.

Never was there a more genuine sound than the words uttered on that desolate hill outside Jerusalem. That hill the *Place of the Skull—Golgotha* where Jesus was crucified. While he is being tortured, literally laid bare in pain, as his arms are stretched out, nailed upon the Cross, Jesus shows the world who he is at his very core.

He says to God, he prays to our Lord in heaven and says, “Father, *forgive them for they know not what they do.*” (Luke 23:34)

All he has said, all he has done, compressed into ten words. “*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.*” Can you hear it? The sound of *the genuine*.

Then the crowd mocks him. One of the bandits, crucified next to him, also taunts, saying, “*Come on—if you are the savior, the messiah, the one we’ve all been waiting for, then save yourself and save us.*” (Luke 23:35)

Then the other bandit rebukes the one who mocks Jesus saying, “*Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation: And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds...*” (Luke 23:41)

“*We are getting what we deserve for our deeds...*” The sound of the genuine. The bandit claims his reality. He owns who he is. Then knowing who he is, and hearing genuinely who Jesus is, he says, “*Remember me when you come into your Kingdom.*” (Luke 23:42)

And Jesus says, “*Truly, this day you will be with me in Paradise.*” (Luke 23:43).

The first bandit, the bandit who mocks Jesus, fails to own the genuine precarious predicament of his soul. And on some level, who can blame him. But the second bandit, offers and understands and articulates the genuineness of his brokenness and in doing so becomes open to Jesus’ love.

Hearing the sound of the genuine, knowing who we are, owning who and how we are, leads us home to all that is Holy.

Knowing who we are, whose we are, made in God’s image and God’s likeness, owning our goodness, our “God-ness” and our brokenness, relishing the harmonies of our genuineness, will be the song of our salvation. You are of God. Own who you are.

I believe it is our comfort in being fully who we are that allows us to connect deeply with God and with others. Witness that moment of depth in the midst of death, that moment of connection on the Cross between two suffering souls, each bringing love each being who they are.

I am convinced that no matter how gifted and talented we may be, we cannot, do the work of God alone. We cannot even approach all that God has given us to do, by ourselves.

I want to go back to Howard Thurman, in that same sermon at Spellman college he also said,

“Now if I hear the sound of the genuine in me, and if you hear the sound of genuine in you, it is possible to for me to go down in me and come up in you. So that when I look at myself through your eyes having made that pilgrimage, I see in me what you see in me and the walls that separates and divides will disappear.”

Think about how our world might change, if truly inhabiting ourselves we could see how others see, imagine then how much you and I might do that together, with the sound of genuine ringing out between. You and me, both of us, all of us, together.

Amen.