

Knowing We're Loved

Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48; I John 4:7-10; John 15:9-17
May 21, 2006

Knowing that we're loved, and loved unconditionally— knowing this about ourselves is essential for affirming our humanity.

Yet our experience shows us how broken this freely-given love becomes by the time it reaches us, this love with which and for which we came into being. So much is this the case that tenacious voices take root in our souls, in our consciences, and in our bodies, insisting that we are not worthy of being loved. Holding out against these voices is hard enough. But when we hear them amplified at higher and higher volume by societal behavior and by a communications media laden with prejudices, racism, and xenophobia, then holding out against them becomes even harder...it becomes even harder to believe that we're loved and even more to live in this belief.

The communities centered around the disciple John saw something unique in Jesus. They saw that the man from Nazareth lived as if he truly were loved. He lived and celebrated *agapé*— the Greek word for self-giving fellowship— every day. He was the bearer of that love which, to the extent that it is freely affirmed in the “other,” is fulfilled in ourselves at the same time. Perhaps that's why Jesus says that this love is dynamically interpersonal. “As the Father loves me, so I love you... You must then love each other.”

But we, his disciples, discover that our being chosen and loved came before our capacity to love and enabled it ... “It is not that we have loved God... it is that he has loved us first.” Paraphrasing the Taoist master: “When this love is my sole possession, I am invincible.”

The world's movement of migrants, seen from through the eyes of the population that receives them, tends to provoke fear. Arriving migrants are seen not only as strangers but as enemies even before arriving. We can speak of an ethical predisposition against the “other.” This works against the fact that opening ourselves to otherness could create new paths that might enrich both parties in the migratory phenomenon. Only those who have experienced unconditional love can break the barriers that block that opening.

Migrant community members instantly recognize within the Anglo population those people who are open, welcoming, and unprejudiced. This is because these Anglo people live the experience of unconditional love right in the midst of the paranoia created by our xenophobic political structures. These people value their migrant neighbors and take the initiative to go to meet them. They are open to learning about their lives. They freely affirm those who are strangers to them. In this way they initiate an enriching cycle of growth in human encounter and mutual collaboration. As the fruit of a similar experience the young Christian community arrived at a beautiful realization: “God is not partial.”

We have to commit to **persevering** in this freely-given love which constitutes and sustains us all...

But how is this done? We have to do as the migrants themselves do. We first have to feel deeply, as they do, the evil of every experience of discrimination without internalizing that discrimination. We have to learn not to judge ourselves harshly just because we are judged harshly by others. By persevering in openness we see clearly how we are rejected simply because we are migrants. But at the same time we evoke through this perseverance the creative power of love that God has placed in the deepest part of

ourselves, a power that affirms our worthiness to be loved. And we remember that God, who loved us first, was a stranger himself— a stranger who took the initiative and crossed a mighty frontier in order to share the lives of a varied humanity. Only authentic love can overcome barriers as great as these.

And so we know God says to each one of us, migrant and Anglo alike: “You, my child, are a person sent by the Father to cross frontiers, carrying with you a message of transformation. And so repeat this ‘mantra’ without ceasing: ‘I am a person unconditionally loved, I have been sent on a mission....’”

