



October 31, 2021

## Thirty First Sunday of Ordinary Time

*"You are not far from the reign of God." Mark 12:34*

Dear Friends;

In a video interview German Reformed Church liberation theologian Jürgen Moltmann (born 1926) said, *"We are not loved because we are so beautiful and good. We are beautiful and good because we are loved."*

Too often Christians, especially bishops and priests, have a negative starting point for our understanding of God and creation. They/we start with sin. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that there is something fundamentally broken or wrong with humanity. But as the saying goes *"You find what you're looking for."* But with such a negative start it is hard to overcome the isolation and exclusion that this negative starting point generates. We become forever isolated from God and one another.

Before there was human sinfulness there was our original goodness. The book of Genesis demonstrates a God who creates everything that exists out of a life-giving love. In *"God's image and likeness"* all things are made. This starts us out on a positive and hopeful direction. Our origin is divine at our core is not "original sin" but "original blessing." God creates all that is and sees that it is all "very good."

That original goodness is the place to which we are always trying to return. There are many detours along the way and we are tempted by the voices that tempted Jesus to doubt. *"If you are the Son of God..."* (Matthew 4: 3 & 6). Voices that cause us to doubt our original goodness as a child of God (even if it is the preaching of priests or bishops) are demonic because they separate us from our original goodness.

True religion brings us to the realization that we are all objectively one with God. This is so important for us to know and to believe. Franciscan Friar Richard Rohr rightly says, *"The great illusion we must overcome is the illusion of separateness. It is almost the only task of religion—to communicate not worthiness but union, to connect people to their original identity..."* Sin is that which disconnects us from God and from one another. Sin isolates and excludes.

In our reading from the Gospel of Mark an expert in the law approaches Jesus. He observed that Jesus skillfully responds to his critics with insight and wisdom. So he asks Jesus a question not to challenge his honor (as most questions are in this culture). This scribe wants to get a fuller reading on Jesus' insight into the law. *"Jesus how do you understand what is at the heart of the law, what is its basis?"*

Jesus responds that it is love—the love God has for us calls us to respond in love for God. Then Jesus connects the love for God with the love of others. The insight of Jesus steers us away from the illusion of separation. It aims us in the direction of our home of original blessing. Our love for God in isolation is impossible to evaluate.

It is only our love of neighbor and creation, made in God's image that indicates the depth of our love for God. It is only in loving our neighbor that we can love God always and everywhere. The more determined we are to surrender to union with God the more we must work to love our neighbor and all creation. It is all very good.

Peace,

*Ft Ron*