

**Sermon for Fourth Sunday After Epiphany and Annual Meeting
February 3, 2019 – Church of Reconciliation, San Antonio
The Rev. Judith L. Rhodes**

The Plumb Line: Love in a Time of Transition

In her brilliant and tiny sized book, *To Pause at the Threshold: Reflections on Living on the Border*, the author, Esther de Waal, a contemporary mystic and spiritual writer of all things, Benedictine, reminds the reader of a traditional saying of ancient wisdom, “A threshold is a sacred thing.” She goes on to note that in some traditional cultures, and in monastic life, this is still remembered. She recalls her visit to Japan where the role of the threshold is honored as the Japanese stand on the lintel in order to remove the shoes worn outside in the street. Upon entering the house, they put on slippers placed inside the door. This forces a very deliberate and conscious way of standing still, even if only for a moment, in order to show respect for the difference between two spaces, the outer and the inner; the preparation for the encounter with another person, another household.

At Abode Home, the social hospice founded by Edwin and Patsy Sasek, those of us who honor the vision and values of our founders as well as the encounters with our guests that make of our Abode family, a sacred, contemplative community, many of us stand before the door, at the threshold of entering, pausing to take a deep breath of the Spirit in preparation for crossing over the threshold with a sense of holy expectancy. For me, this practice includes pausing and breathing in gratitude as I take my leave of the place and cross the threshold to return to my life beyond Abode Home.

de Waal further reminds us of the traditional monastic practice of *statio*, where the monk or nun enters the chapel for the praying of the daily offices and always leaves himself or herself time to stand, to wait, to let go of all the demands of whatever might be distractions in order to enter into that space empty, awaiting whatever the Spirit of God desires to fill their soul and spirit.

Today, on this fourth Sunday after the Epiphany we are being invited to take a deep breath of the Spirit, to let go of all distractions, anxieties, fears, and expectations- to empty ourselves, so that as we cross the holy threshold to gather around this sacred table, we await the gifts only the Holy may offer us.

Yes, a threshold *is* a sacred thing. A threshold, if we pay attention, calls us to attentiveness to the holy work of change and transition. A threshold calls us to stop, pause, breathe, and let go so that the opus Dei, the work of God as de Waal describes it, is what we set our hearts and minds to honoring and doing with our bodies, our minds, and our spirits.

My friends, today is the Annual Meeting for Church of Reconciliation, San Antonio. It is a day of holy reflection, of looking back, of giving thanks, of emptying our hearts of whatever burdens or unsettles us as we cross the threshold into a new year of life in this sacred community of friends following in the Way of Jesus, the Way of Love. And it is a different threshold we cross this year following upon Robert's announcement of his retirement last week. We can acknowledge that this is Robert's last annual meeting as our Rector, and we can note that June 2, the Feast of Pentecost will be his last Sunday with us as Rector. And we are invited to cross this threshold with profound gratitude for the many gifts and blessings we have shared in one another's company. The truth of the matter is that this is in-between time... and we must intentionally commit ourselves to a way of being, a Way of Love, that will nurture us, inspire us, enfold us, and guide us.

I ask you, how do you wish to walk in Robert and Julie's company during these next few months, intentionally, prayerfully, gratefully? Please take time to pause and reflect on how you will participate thoughtfully, prayerfully, and gratefully over these next months and beyond. Such intentionality is the to practice the Way of Love, the Way of Jesus with one another and to make room for the opus Dei, the work of God and the power of the Holy Spirit among us.

What a wonderful gift it is, also, to have this Epistle from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, reminding us of the plumb line of Love as we cross this threshold of transition. Yes, there will be the structure of the search process and the support of the Bishop throughout the next several months to anticipate. Yes, we have time to express our gratitude to Robert and Julie for the generosity of their love and labor over these 16+ years... yes, there is much to do...

But I caution you, my friends, let us **NOT** succumb to some frenzied feelings or harried activities anticipating the changes and transitions around and about us. Let us, in the Benedictine spirit of Love, stand at the threshold of transition and focus all our attention on the greatest gift there is, the holy virtue of Love.

De Waal writes of living on the border in this way, "I suppose that I might sum it up by saying that I have become aware of the continual movement of crossing over thresholds into the new, while still of course being part of what is left behind ... open to change ready and willing to move forward, living without defenses rather than hiding behind barriers. In the end, if I were to find one single world that catches this sense of thresholds opening up what is new and unknown, it would be transformation - and transformations "are always a little scary." Isn't that the truth! It is certainly true in my life, especially faced with change and transition over which I have little or no control. However, you and I always have the freedom to choose how we will be in the midst of transition and change. How openhearted, uncritical, patient and loving will we be in the very midst of transition?"

de Waal asks, "Am I willing to cross the threshold of new understanding, of new beginnings, of new encounters and relationships, by being open and receptive, not closed in and not defensive? ... I see the moment of crossing over as the threshold moment, the pause between, and this I believe is what holds the key..."

Today, my friends, in the text from first Corinthians, we are given the foundational orientation of how we are to live, to orient our bodies, minds, and spirits, most especially in the threshold moments, the moments in-between, in the times of changes and transitions, of good-byes and of hellos.

At the time of Paul's letter, the Church in Corinth was doing real and destructive battle with each other over a number of issues. Paul inserts this passage in his letter not to offer a pious reflection on the way things should be, but rather to call the Corinthians to account for their behavior. Such accountability continues to us, in this time and place.

The love described in 1 Corinthians is a love we experience as God's unshakeable grasp upon our lives. It is the source of our greatest security and salvation and, thus, our freedom to actually be patient and kind, to bear all things and not to insist on our own way.

How can you and I, each and every one of us embody the message of the Way of Love as we move through this season of transition? What does patience look and feel like during times of uncertainty? How might you and I practice the spiritual and interior discipline of pausing... pausing before we hastily speak, pausing before we have a critical, judgmental thought, pausing in order to reach all the way underneath our anxiety, or fear, to find the foundational gift of gratitude and Love that is always buried in our heart?

In my office here at Rec, I have a very old framed ink drawing with the words of Mother Teresa, in calligraphy, "Love is a fruit of all seasons at all times and within reach of every hand."

As we leave this sanctuary today, may we remember these words. May we pause before each of the thresholds of our lives, especially at this threshold of transition, committing ourselves to patience and kindness, openheartedness, and hopefulness, recalling over and over again that Love never ends.

May we recommit ourselves to the Way of Love of Jesus... believing that in all times and seasons, Love is within the reach of every hand. Yours and mine... In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.