

June 30, 2019

Love 301 “Wholehearted Living: Cultivating Authenticity and Letting Go of What Other People Think of You”

Esther 1:10-12, 19, 21-22, 3:5-6, 9a, 12a, 13-17

Luke 4:16-22

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Whenever my Dad thought any of us were not all in, giving whatever we were doing our best, he would say, “don’t do anything half-assed.” (Yes, I did debate for a while whether I would use that word in a sermon, yet it would have been inauthentic for me to tell the story without it)!

The truth is, over the years I have thought about that phrase a lot. In order for us to give something our “a” double “s”, we need to turn our back. Thus, this phrase has really helped me understand that to be less than wholehearted, means I’ve turned my back on it, and maybe even more important, I have turned my back on myself.

Brene Brown, social worker, and widely read author, has done extensive research on what are the components of someone who is “Whole Hearted.” And I want to share those ten guideposts to whole-hearted living with you over the next ten weeks, because how can we do Love: 301, without exploring what it means to be wholehearted, living all in.

Brown offers ten guideposts that ask us to cultivate something, and let go of something else. And thus, the first guidepost we will explore today: “Cultivating Authenticity” and “Letting Go of What People Think of You”. Along with the theory and how to of the guidepost, I will also be presenting figures in scripture who lived out these guideposts, including Jesus.

Truth is, I have written this sermon twice. One with all the definitions and how to with no life illustrations and the other shares research with the weaving of story and the story of biblical figures. So, with the risk of vulnerability comes, out with the theory only, and in with self-disclosure.

I remember not too long after I told my mother when I was in my late twenties, that I was gay, she said to me, "I feel so sorry for you that you are gay." Defensively, I said, "Don't be Mom, I have the greatest love anyone could ever have." Too which she said, "I worry what people will do to you." She was right to worry. Since coming out to my myself and then others, it has been a consistent struggle to stay true to who I am and to let go of what people think of me. She was right, I have been threatened on the street, called horrible names, and even lost close, longtime friends because of it, (and most of them claimed to be Christian) and not considered for jobs and buying a house without accompanying degrading and despairing words.

In the very early days, I prayed God would take my "gayness" away, then when facing ordination, I prayed God would give me the strength to be celibate, now I thank God on a regular basis for the life God has given me because I am gay.

Being gay is not all who I am, though it is a very important part of me to claim if I am going to be authentic, living with a whole-heart and being real. Yet, it comes along with not fitting gender roles: Lynn "the tomboy", along with Lynn the "woman", then there is Lynn the "Christian". In all those role identities, I have had to let go of what people think of me, and be "I", authentic, and real.

Ireneus in 134 C.E. wrote, "The glory of God is man fully alive."

In other words, when we are all of who we are – and only then, is God truly glorified!

So now, let's move from the why is it important to how do we make number one guidepost into whole hearted living integrated into our every day life: cultivating authenticity and letting go of what others think of us.

Authenticity is a collection of choices that we have to make every day. It's about a choice to show up and be real.

- The choice to be honest.
- The choice to let our true selves be seen. All of us have some level of self-doubt and shame. All of us have sold ourselves out and been anybody others needed us to be.

The idea that we can choose authenticity holds the potential to make us feel both hopeful and exhausted. Hopeful, because real is something we value. Exhausted, because we know that our culture seeks to dictate everything to us from how much we're suppose to weigh to what our houses are supposed to look like – and thus all of that seems like a huge undertaking.

So, in the interest of getting on with it, let's begin with what authenticity looks like:

- It's about having the courage to be vulnerable which is what is required when you share your true self.
- It's about having compassion because all of us are made of strength and struggle.
- It's about connection and nurturing the sense of belonging that only happens when we believe we are enough.

Choosing authenticity is not an easy choice. e.e.cummings wrote, "To be nobody-but-yourself in a world which is doing its

best, night and day, to make you everybody but yourself- means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight-and never stop fighting.” “Staying real” is one of the most courageous battles that we’ll ever fight.

There are risks in putting your true self out there, but there is even more risk in hiding yourself and your gifts from the world. Our unexpressed ideas, opinions and contributions don’t just go away. They are likely to fester and eat away at our worthiness. Brene Brown suggest we should be born with a warning label similar to the ones that come with cigarette packages: *Caution: if you trade in your authenticity for safety, you may experience the following anxiety, depression, eating disorders, addiction, rage, blame, resentment and inexplicable grief.* Sacrificing who we are for the sake of what other people think just isn’t worth it.

In conclusion, let’s take a few moments to delve into three Biblical figures that show us some very important things when it comes to authenticity.

- Let’s begin with our gal Vashti. Selected among so many women to be the king’s queen from his large number of concubines. Though the passage doesn’t directly say, but hints at, Vashti knew what the king was asking her to do – dance naked in front of his drunk party friends. She refused. A dangerous move that could have caused her death, yet a move that she felt was the only life-giving move she could make. She sang loudly and proudly, when kicked out of the palace, “I gotta be me.” She knew in her heart of hearts she could not be some boy toy, every partygoer’s centerfold, nor would she allow anyone to treat her as only a body.
- Next, let’s look at Queen number two, Esther (Vashti’s replacement). It begins with she asking to see the King.

Talk about speaking up, it was not permissible to ask; it was only permissible to be summoned. Esther didn't buy that. She knew she needed to speak up and be real. Due to some bruised ego and what was equivalent of a boy's playground pissing contest, there was an edict pronounced that all Jews were to be killed. Up to this point, Esther had kept secret, unrevealed, had never spoken aloud she was Jewish. Now she needed to stand up and be real, if she and her people were to really live, much less survive! And speak up, she did, and things were averted. Maybe, as scripture says, she was born for such a time as this.

- Last, but not least, our teacher Jesus refused time and time again to be modeled into someone he was not. And when they could not get him to be other than himself, they decided to talk bad about him. After struggling for 40 days in the wilderness with "the devil" about who he is and what he is, Jesus goes to the temple in his own hometown. He states flat out what he is going to do, based on who he is. Immediately, they call into question his worthiness. Isn't this Mary and Joseph's snot nosed kid. Isn't this Marge and Russ's feisty redheaded little girl!

We can't move forward on the road to authenticity, if we do not first recognize and accept our worthiness. Don't trust what other people say regarding your worthiness, believe God instead. When we start with our worthiness from God's perspective, we can handle anyone's put downs, dismissing, devaluing or degrading; because we come from a place of our own truth, not their misguided, self-interest.

Given all this, let's be brave with our life, so others can be brave with theirs.

