

"Breathing Under Water: Desperate Desiring"
Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Today's scripture is about loving God with our whole being. It is an invitation and a challenge as most of us struggle with that. I remember about 17 years ago having a quiet mystical experience in prayer. It was the first time for me to really feel the love of God in my whole being. It took several years of contemplative prayer before I could honestly say that I had a clue about loving God with my mind, heart, body, and soul. I know that I am not alone in this. Many of us learn about loving God in an intellectual way through a belief system, but to truly open our being to God's love could be very difficult. So the second step of AA is "came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity." The challenge of this step is not just that some of us believe in God while others don't. One of our temptations when it comes to faith is to reduce it to doctrines and beliefs. But this step is about something much deeper!

In his book *Breathing Under Water* Richard Rohr writes that this step is about opening up three spaces in ourselves at the same time: "Our opinionated head, our closed-down heart, and our defensive and defended body." It is about letting go of the defense mechanisms we acquired in childhood to protect ourselves and which often hinder us from the freedom of being in the fullness of God's love.

In 2016 Fuller seminary produced a powerful video about a discussion between Bono of U2 (the band) and Eugene Peterson, the Bible translator of the Message. Bono had been touched deeply by the translation/paraphrase of the Bible by Peterson. So, he sought Peterson out and tried to get him to come and visit with him and the band, but Peterson, not really knowing who Bono was and having a writing deadline, graciously declined the offer. Then Bono arranged to go visit Peterson in his home in Montana. They had an honest discussion about faith and the Psalms. Here is a clip from the interview which was really powerful about coming before God in honesty and openness just like the Psalmist did:

<https://youtu.be/-l40S5e90KY>

I loved the piece about being open to God body, mind, and soul. That is the work of the process of loving a "Power greater than ourselves." And that is the invitation of our scripture in Deuteronomy 6 (read Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

This commandment to love God is what the Jewish people often highlight as the foundation for their faith. It is a pivotal scripture that the religious scholar and most all the people of Israel would have known by heart. It is part of Jewish morning and evening prayers till this day. When Jesus was asked about the most important commandment, he highlighted the command to love God and to love neighbors. All the other commandments about not stealing, killing, or cheating are rooted in one's love for God.

The context for the giving of these commandments is very important because it reminds us that the love of God is not something that just enhances our lives. It is the very essence of our lives. Addiction/sin comes for us when we forget this and try to live life as we are separate from God. Loving God is what makes us fully human and fully free to live to our fullest potential. Under the leadership of Moses, the people of ancient Israel left the

oppression of slavery in Egypt. Moses led them through their long time in the wilderness to help shape them into the values of the kingdom of God; values of justice, peace, and love. God provided them with the laws they needed to live out the values of the kingdom of God. Part of that law was what we know today as the Ten Commandments. But there is a lot more to the Law of Moses than just the Ten Commandments. The law included pretty much every aspect of their lives: Economic, social, spiritual, and personal. This was all outlined in Exodus. Deuteronomy, meaning “second law,” is the reaffirmation of the covenant between God and the people of Israel. Here the legal tradition of the book of Exodus (the covenant code) is not just repeated, it is reinterpreted in contemporary terms, so that the promises and demands of the covenant were brought near to every worshipping Israelite.

The book of Deuteronomy is basically a farewell speech (or actually three) by Moses to the people of Israel as they were about to enter the Land of Promise. He wanted to remind them of what was really important about God’s teachings to them. Now the people are free and the question is before them: Who are you going to be as God's people? How are you going to conduct your life together as a community in the new land? Freedom is not about chaos and doing whatever comes to one’s mind. (screen) Freedom is about learning to live through an inner sense of peace, that place of deep love within our hearts. The guidance of God is important to make the people’s freedom meaningful and to guard them against the practices that lead to slavery/addiction. The people had to live by a different set of guidelines than those of societies that end up being addicted to power, possessions and esteem. The theme of freedom is central to the identity of the people of God. It included the external freedom from the tyranny of the Egyptians, but it also included their internal state of freedom. We can relate to that. We can be free on the outside, but our internal state could be enslaving us to thoughts, feelings, and actions that harm us. The key to the Israelite’s freedom was focusing on their deep desire for God. If other things got in the way, they would lose their freedom. If they placed their focus on power, possessions, or esteem, they would be enslaved by these false idols. Freedom is not about chaos and doing whatever comes to one’s mind. Freedom is about learning to live through an inner sense of peace, that place of deep love within the heart.

So today we come hearing these commandments and wondering what they mean for us in our own context, in our own lives. What does it mean for us today to love God? Why is it important for us to remember that the love of God is the most essential part of our lives? How does it protect us from the slaveries/addictions of our own day? How do we live in this freedom?

Richard Rohr challenges us to allow love to open our minds, our hearts, and our bodies. If God’s love is to heal us, we need to open our minds through contemplative practices of prayer. If God’s love is to heal us, we need to open our hearts through being honest about our old hurts and wounds to let them go. If God’s love is to heal us, we need to open our bodies to let go of memories and the negative energies of past hurts. Rohr writes, “the work of spirituality is the ongoing liberation of head, heart, and body, toward full luminous seeing and living, and not a mere mental ‘decision for Jesus’ or the one-time insurance policy of sacraments received. Most head churches do not touch the heart, most heart

churches do not bother with the head, and almost all of them ignore the body as if of no account.”

We are going to have some fun today. You are invited to turn to your neighbors in groups of three or four and to respond to these questions from Richard Rohr’s *Breathing Under Water Companion Journal*:

How do you get in the way of your own healing and growth? Name three of your defensive behaviors. What can you do to begin to change at least one? What helps you stay open to life?

I would like to end with a story about the power of God’s love for healing us. This is the story of Thistle Farms which were founded by Episcopal priest Becca Stevens. According to their website, “**Thistle Farms** is a nonprofit social enterprise, based in Nashville, TN, dedicated to helping women survivors recover and heal from prostitution, trafficking, and addiction. We provide a safe place to live, a meaningful job, and a lifelong sisterhood of support because we believe love is the most powerful force in the world.” Their business motto is “Love Heals.” Here is the video overview of their work:

<https://youtu.be/O6nLjGoMAww>

It is a powerful reminder for us about the power of love to heal us. Loving God with all of our hearts, minds, and souls is about that healing. Becca Stevens writes, “Everyone could use more healing in their lives. We could all use some space to dream about what healing might look like for us. Healing may mean finding peace after trauma, feeling hope in the midst of grief, forgiving after being hurt, or just relief from the daily wear and tear of living in a broken world.”

We will end with the affirmation used by the women at Thistle Farms that is in your bulletin/announcements for today (screen):

I believe that love heals.
And when I forget
I believe that
I connect to creation,
Commit to a daily practice,
Cultivate compassion,
Create a grateful heart,
And come home to myself.
Then I remember. Amen.