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Purple ROL

John 13:31-35
Colossians 3:1-17

When she first saw the blue lights and realized they were for her, she felt angry and frustrated. But she quickly got control of herself and cultivated a spirit of self-righteous surprise and patience. When the police officer asked for her license and registration, she complied. But when he took his time reading and comparing the driver's license picture to her profile, she could stand it no longer. "Officer", she demanded, "why in the world did you stop me?!"

"Ma'am", the officer said, "I noticed you a few miles back when you cut two cars off in traffic and almost caused an accident. Then, you were driving too close to the car in front of you for conditions on Forest Drive. But it was when the person in the left turn lane was too slow to turn on that yellow light so that you had to wait, and when you honked your horn and made that rude hand gesture, that was when I noticed the fish sticker on the back of your car. So, naturally, I assumed the car was stolen."

Theologian, Richard Rohr says that only transformed people can transform the world. And it appears to me that the American Christian Church has not produced significant numbers of people who are transformed by the love of Christ to transform our own neighborhoods, much less the nation or world. And so, the institutional church has, by and large, earned the rejection of much of our culture and given rise to both the phenomenon of those who are spiritual but not religious – those who have faith in God but who feel no need for the community of faith – and to the "dones" – those who have been a part of a Christian Church and are done with the religious institution of Church. The spiritual but not religious and the "dones" have judged the Christian Church judgmental, hypocritical and exclusive. So, they pursue a personal spirituality that focuses on ill-defined, sentimental, personal beliefs that make sense to that individual in their own context, but that do not link them to any larger community of require any accountability, rigor or disciplined practices.

But, I invite you to consider the possibility that there are more than two choices. The only two choices are not either a judgmental, hypocritical institution OR an egocentric, private and undisciplined faith that requires little of us beyond being kind – at least to the people who agree with us. There is another choice besides being either only Spiritual (or Done) OR only Religious.

There is a third choice, and that is the choice to be part of the community of the risen Christ. I would like to invite you to consider what it looks like to be BOTH religious AND spiritual. Being both a part of a Christian Community who calls, encourages, teaches us to have a personal, authentic relationship with God and with others is really what I mean by a Purple Christian.

Today is the fourth in a four Sunday sermon series on being Purple Christians. And, today I would like to talk some about how to steer between the ditches of “only Spiritual or Done” and “only Religious”, and hold out the possibility that we can live TOGETHER as those who are actively seeking to be changed and transformed for the purpose of changing the world for God’s purposes. I have said that to be a Purple Christian is to hold our identity as children of God and disciples of Christ above every other identity. And today I’d like to talk about the PURPLE RULE OF LIFE – or ROL – that at least moves us in that direction.

ROL stands for “Rule of Life” – those commitments, disciplines and practices that guide us both personally and collectively towards a shared purpose or goal. And, A Rule of Life for disciples of Jesus MUST be grounded in the RULE OF LOVE (ALSO ROL) that is embodied in the new commandment that Jesus gives to his disciples. So a Christian Rule of Life IS the Rule of Love!

I want to say again, what I said last week, that the first step – every day – for all of us is to pray that we will believe, trust and live out of the assurance that God knows us and loves us. Every morning, we are to ask ourselves, “Who are you?” and our answer is, “I am a child of God.” Then say, “What does it mean to be a child of God?” “That I belong to God who loves me.” The only true foundation for Christian Life is that assurance of the love of God. Not fear! Not guilt! When we pray to believe that God loves us, then we will be able to seek God and to be changed more and more into the image of the God we have come to know in Jesus Christ. So, the first step towards a Purple ROL is to pray to believe that we are loved. Then, and only then can we make a commitment to the disciplines of being a disciple without falling into rigid, judgmental, appearance based faith.

Once we are convinced that we are known, loved and claimed by God, then it becomes much easier for us to believe that God knows, loves and claims all others who are made in the image of God. Then, the real transformation can begin. And, for this morning, I want for us to begin to define a Purple Rule of Life by asking ourselves two questions.

1. Do my daily priorities and choices create more compassion, kindness, humility, patience, forgiveness, love and thanksgiving?
2. Or do my daily priorities and choices create in me more evil desire, greed, anger, adultery, wrath, malice, slander, abusive language and lying?

Notice, I am taking these lists from the lists in Colossians 3. We could go to many other Scriptures, but this is a great place to begin.

A Purple ROL defines and commits to those practices and priorities that will help us become more patient, more humble, more grateful and more loving.

What are we currently doing that generates feelings of anger, wrath, envy, pride, greed, or that produces lies and abusive language? [I don't think that means that we have to give up golf, watching sports or driving – but we may have to give up the way in which we do those things!]

And, this morning, I want to speak to two areas where, I believe, all of us may need some accountability and better disciplines over the next few months if we are going to actually work on transformation and being able to live as Purple Christians.

First, near the top of Purple ROL has got to be seeking truth. And by seeking truth I mean seeking God who is truth itself. Christians measure truth by The Word of God – and we know that Word in Scripture and in the person of Jesus Christ. So, a Purple ROL has got to include reading and studying Scripture regularly (not just listening on Sunday morning). And, seeking truth means that we do not settle only for that with which we agree. We are, every one of us, partial and limited and ignorant of our own ignorance. So, one of the practices that I believe is really getting in the way of a Purple ROL is the tendency we all have to surround ourselves with people and information that agree with us. Instead, Purple Christians seek to know all of the truth, not just that which agrees with our own prejudices.

I believe that it may be that Purple Christians need to give serious consideration to the effects that watching or listening to partisan, 24-hour, opinion/news has on our ability to seek truth. If we are getting all of our news from only a conservative or progressive source, without seeking out disparate opinions, then we need to have the integrity to acknowledge that we only want the truth that agrees with our own opinions. If our political identity determines our church community and friends, then our faith is in our political identity and not in Christ. It is time for us to consider whether watching highly partisan news is useful or productive IF our goal is to grow in the list that Colossians offers us.

And, this same danger exists with regards to social media. We all know that when we begin to do internet research on our next purchase that the algorithms of the internet world magically begin to produce ads featuring the product we were just researching. So, do we really think that the news that we get from Facebook or Twitter is impartial? As the old country song sings, "Denial is more than a river in Egypt." Neither the Republicans nor the Democrats have the whole truth. When we feed our hearts and minds with a steady diet of partial and partisan news we not only feed our tendencies to anger, slander, malice and abusive language, but we also waste hours that could be spent praying, worshiping, resting or serving. We can do nothing about what "they" do and say. But there is much good that we can do about the needs of those around us. I'm not saying don't be informed. I'm asking us to consider what it really means to be informed and to consider the possibility that it is easier to surround ourselves with partial news that reaffirms our own biases than it is to seek disparate views that challenge our world views or that may help us become people marked by humility, patience, kindness and love.

In the months ahead, let's covenant to ask ourselves if watching and reading partisan news helps us become more Christ like, or gets in the way of our transformation, and adjust accordingly. Decide today to stop watching only partisan news and feeding the deep political divide by seeking truth – even when it disagrees with our own positions. Decide today to seek

truth as only God can see it and to embrace the humility of those who know that we are partial, limited and unable to see as God sees.

Second, also near the top of a Purple ROL has got to be dealing with our own anger and resentment. The level of anger and resentment in our country is frightening and appears to be on the rise. We can all decry the anger and hostility of white supremacy. We can all shake our heads at the anger that erupts in gun violence, weekly mass shootings, domestic abuse and a growing toleration of public rage. We do need to demand that our governments act to curb acts of violence. Why must we choose between common sense gun laws OR increased mental health resources? What is needed is both! But after you and I, according to our own consciences, have called on our government to do what governments need and must to do, the only thing you and I can really effect is our own anger, rage and resentment. Anger, rage and resentment are giant spiritual problems in our country. And unless Christians hold each other accountable to recognize and to heal our own anger, rage and resentment, we run the risk of not being able to be the Church of Jesus Christ. Purple Christians take very seriously how our own anger prevents us from living the Rule of Love and blocks our attempts to become more like Christ.

The life of faith is NOT simply a fire evacuation plan for the end of our human lives. Being a disciple of Christ is NOT a “get out of hell free” card! The life of Christian discipleship is a better way of living that generates love, joy, generosity, humility and compassion HERE AND NOW. And, before we can get very far, we have got to pay attention to our own anger and resentment and decide to seek help from God and the community to make changes in our own lives. We must be healed before we can be useful to God in healing and transforming the world.

Remember that Jesus gave that new commandment to love immediately after Judas Iscariot leaves to go tell the authorities where to arrest Jesus. The command to love does not wait until everyone is nice to us. The command to love does not wait until we get our way. The command to love is not reserved for people who agree with us.

So, this week, let’s evaluate our participation in the partisan, angry 24-hour news cycle. And, when we feel anger surging up inside of us, let’s agree to stop and to pray and to practice giving the anger to God and praying for an assurance of love instead. Decide to return love and patience for someone else’s anger or hostility this week. Pray that we will be able to see the other person and the other “side” as God sees them.

When we seek to know and to love God personally, and we seek out the accountability of the community of those who also are struggling to lift our identity as children of God above every other identity, then it may be that we will be able to live – in words and in deeds – in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving God the thanks.