



Transcending Contempt
Session Five
February 3rd, 2024
The Rev. Christopher H. Martin
St. Paul's Episcopal Church, San Rafael, California

Regard Your Neighbor as a PERSON

Agenda

- 9:00 Gather in both Duncan Hall and Zoom
- 9:05 Break into groups of three
- 9:20 Gather back into two larger groups, in Duncan Hall and Zoom
- 9:25 Tanner and Christopher report back
- 9:35 Teaching
- 9:55 Q & A

Teaching

- I. Introduction
 - A. Practicing WAG, Nurturing Magnanimity, Stewarding Your Halo, Loving Ourselves (three Habits), now a fifth and final practice.
 - B. Words: False Human Hierarchy, Surd, Trapped, Repair, PERSON
 - C. False Human Hierarchy and Race

- II. Black and White

- A. Introduction to Baldwin via Carpenter
- B. Quotes and Commentary (In supplemental materials)
- C. From Trapped to Free: May I shed my label white?

III. Repair

- A. Introduction to Christina Sharpe
- B. Quotes and Commentary (In supplemental materials)
- C. From Complicit to Creatively Entangled: Work Shoulder to Shoulder

IV. PERSON

- A. “It is not enough to leave Egypt; one must also enter the promised land.” St. John Chrysostom.
- B. PERSON: A way to revere your neighbor as made in the image and likeness of God.
- C. Jesus loves those above and those below on the false human hierarchy- Matthew 25 and Mark 10

Question for Groups of Three at the beginning of the final session, Session Six

- What are your six words about race?
- Who were three people you held with regard this week? What happened?
- What will you do next to help yourself transcend contempt?

Supplemental Material

1. A collection of quotes from James Baldwin, most drawn from Anne Carpenter’s Nothing Gained is Eternal.
2. A collection of quotes from Christina Sharpe’s Ordinary Notes.
3. A collection of quotes from Simone Weil on force.
4. Chapter Two of my book With Gladness, entitled Look at Each Face.
5. A word from the desert taken from Desert Wisdom by Henri Nouwan and Yushi Nomura

The Five Practices

1. Practicing WAG
2. Nurturing Magnanimity
3. Stewarding Your Halo
4. Loving Ourselves (Three Habits)

5. _____ING _____ (_____)

Quotes From James Baldwin

Transcending Contempt, Session Five: Replace Contempt With Regard
Taken Primarily from Anne Carpenter's book, Nothing Gained is Eternal

Black and White

- In America, the color of my skin has stood between myself and me.
- The question of color, especially in this country, operates to hide the graver questions of the self.

Whiteness

- Whites are trapped in a history they do not understand.
- (To his nephew) We cannot be free until they are free...you must accept them. And I mean this very seriously. You must accept them and accept them with love.
- (In order to face a life like Billie Holliday) the American white has got to accept the fact that what he thinks he is, he is not. He has got to give up, he has got to surrender his image of himself, and apparently this is the last thing white Americans are willing to do.

Summaries

- Carpenter: Color hides the reality and authority of the human subject misnamed black.
- Martin: Color binds the reality and freedom of the human subject misnamed white.

Sharpe on Regard, Care and Repair
Transcending Contempt, Session Five: Replace Contempt With Regard
Taken from Ordinary Notes

“**Regard** is a habit of **care**. It is appreciation and esteem. It is the right of **repair**. (Note 181)

Regard

- (We Black people) are constituted through and by continual vulnerability to overwhelming force though not only known to ourselves and each other by that force...the other knowing that other note, is one that we might call regard. (Note 107)
- My mother made joy. She worked hard at it...those other parts of her life about which I know next to nothing: I have tried to enter with grace and imagine with tenderness or I have left them alone. I owe my mother that. Regard. (Note 162)

Care

- Care: (Bonnie Honig) To cultivate anticipation of another world and to live now dedicated to the task of turning this world into a better one. (Note 91)
- Care is complicated, gendered, misused. It is often mobilized to enact violence, not assuage it, yet I cannot surrender it...I want acts and accounts of care as distributed risk, as mass refusals of unbearable life, as total rejection of the dead future. (Note 234)

Repair

- Spectacle is not repair. (Note 23) Spectacle is the right to capture, capture what is deemed abjection. (Note 173)
- Katrina Browne, the white director of the documentary *Traces of the Trade*, where she discovers that the basis of her New England family's wealth is slave trade, says “her desire to make things right propelled her movement from personal guilt (which may be a position of distance, a position of non-implication, but may also be one of complicity) to grief (a position of relation, one of entanglement).” (Note 46- words in parenthesis are Sharpe's commentary)

Quotes From Simone Weil

Transcending Contempt, Session Five: Replace Contempt With Regard

Taken Primarily from Her Essay: The Iliad of The Poem of Force

Force

- Force is that X that turns anybody who is subjected to it into a thing. Exercised to the limit, it turns man into a thing in the most literal sense: it makes a corpse out of him.
- From the first property flows another, quite prodigious too in its own way, the ability to turn a human being into a thing while he is still alive.
- Force is as pitiless to the man who possess it, or thinks he does, as it is to its victims; the second it crushes, the first it intoxicates...in (The Iliad) there is not a single man who does not at one time or another have to bow his head to force. (Contrast “My yoke is easy and my burden is light.”)

Prestige

- A moderate use of force, which alone would enable man to escape being enmeshed in its machinery, would require superhuman virtue (grace?), which is as rare as dignity in weakness. Moreover, moderation itself is not without its perils since **prestige**, from which force derives at least three quarters of its strength, rests principally upon that marvelous indifference that the strong feel for the weak, an indifference so contagious that it infects the very people who are the objects of it. (and so contempt.)
- (written to a mentor at the beginning of WWII) We should not think that because we are less brutal, less violent, less inhuman than those we are confronting, we will prevail. Brutality, violence and inhumanity have **immense prestige**.* The contrary virtues, so as to have an equivalent prestige, must be exercised in a constant and effective manner. Whoever is only incapable of being as brutal, violent and inhuman as the adversary, yet without exercising the appropriate virtues (e.g. Magnanimity, Hope and Regard), is inferior to this adversary in both inner strength and prestige; and he will not hold his own against him.

Don't Respect Force

- Only he who has measured the dominion of force and knows how not to respect it, is capable of love and justice. (e.g. read the Iliad to measure the dominion of force.)
- We rediscover the epic genius** when we learn there is no refuge from fate, learn not to admire force (its immense prestige) and learn not to hate the enemy nor scorn the unfortunate.

*Un prestige immense: a compelling power to draw people to them, to provoke not just obedience but worship. From Alan Jacobs, Year of Our Lord 1943.

**Weil found the epic genius most clearly only in Homer, Sophocles, Aeschelus and the Gospels.

GENTLE PRACTICE

Look at each face and remember
that they are a PERSON

WORDS

Gladness
Theotropic

PERSON
Enigma



*O God, send me this day to do the work
you have given me to do, to love and serve you
with gladness and singleness of heart. Amen.*

Look at Each Face

Nothing is more fascinating than a human face. One of the great pleasures of going to a great museum is the opportunity to stare as long as you want at a human face in a great portrait painting. Paintings by masters such as Rembrandt or Diego Velázquez seem to capture all the subtlety, ambiguity, and emotional shading of a real face. It is no mistake that the world's most famous painting, the *Mona Lisa*, is of an elusive and compelling human face. Even so, not one face painted by any of these masters is greater than the human faces you will see in the coming week. The first gentle practice invites us to look at each face with the reverence due to one made in the image and likeness of God.

This gentle practice invites us to remember the word “gladness.” The source of our liturgical phrase, “with gladness and singleness of heart,” is a passage from the book of Acts that describes the ideal beginning of the church. Through the centuries, many have used these descriptions of church in the second chapter of Acts as a motivator to be a thriving and holy church in different times and places. In chapter two of Acts, we are told that the disciples gathered together and broke bread “with glad and generous hearts” (Acts 2:46). The word gladness expresses a kind of joyful conviviality, evoking lively and deep gratitude for the gift of being human together, of knowing that we are brothers and sisters in Christ as we share life together. Our outward unity in Christ makes explicit a deep truth that

our unity is not only all people but also with all creation. The Gospel of John tells us that “all things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being” (John 1:3). In Christ, all are one, all of creation. This unity includes each human face we see, and so each face has the potential, when we remember this deep truth, to bring gladness.

Looking at each face makes use of our eyes. The spiritual life is filled with visual images. When God creates the world in Genesis, we are told that God “sees” everything that is made and that it is “very good” (Genesis 1:31). Two of the most moving stories in the gospel involve sight. In a story found only in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus partially heals a man. He tells Jesus, “I can see people, but they look like trees, walking” (Mark 8:24). Jesus lays hands on him again, and the man’s sight is fully restored. In John, an entire chapter is dedicated to the healing of the man born blind, who at one point famously decrees, “I do not know whether [Jesus] is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see” (John 9:25). These stories invite us to imagine both the bestowing of visual sight and the gift of spiritual sight. The story in the Gospel of John inspired the line, “I once was blind, but now I see,” in “Amazing Grace.” Englishman John Newton was a slave trader who became an abolitionist after his conversion to Christianity. I imagine that he wrote the song when he realized that the people in his boat were not commodities but people, and so he recognized that each one was made in the image and likeness of God.

As we move through the coming week, we will encounter three kinds of faces: planned, unplanned, and anonymous. A

first step is to simply be alert to which type of face is before your eyes. A planned face is a known face. As I write this, I am sheltering in place with my family, which I have been doing for two months. I always wake up first, followed by my wife, who gets her coffee before her prayers, then my younger son, who gets a bowl of cereal before going downstairs for virtual high school, and then my older son, who gets up last of all to make a smoothie before a virtual college class. I have a view of these planned faces from my home desk. As I move into my gentle practice of looking at each face, I ask myself: Can I look at these faces in a fresh way, or am I in a rut? Can I remember each day that this face, known well to me, was made in the image and likeness of God? Am I in a rut with how I view this face, in my relationship and in how I see the face of Christ in this familiar person?

The second kind of face is unplanned. When I first taught this material, I made my way to a meeting at church. I arrived about ten minutes early so that I could be there to welcome the known and loved faces of Jacob, Judy, Tanner, Michael, Joan, and Kate. As I pulled into the parking lot, I saw Samantha sitting on an outdoor bench, waiting for me. I got out of the car and sat down next to her. She and I had been texting earlier in the week because she had some things she wanted to tell me, and she needed my help. Samantha was part of a support group for teen mothers I had helped facilitate. Samantha explained that her phone had died, and she didn’t have the means to fix it or get a new one. She then began to speak and cry, and I settled in for what I knew would be a long time with Samantha.

I am confident that, even before arriving at the teaching in this chapter, I would have chosen to stay with Samantha, at least for a time. But now that I was embracing the gentle practice of looking at each face, I was more aware of the mystery that unplanned faces during my day may not be part of my plan but were probably part of God's. I settled fully into being with Samantha, my heart undivided, allowing her to set the time. I was late for my other meeting, but the work of the day was very near me, in the face of Samantha. Our time together was a piece of the good work God had prepared for me to walk in that week. When we encounter unplanned or expected faces, are we alert and responsive? Do we set aside our own timelines and to-do's and focus on the person in front of us?

When I was able to join my planned meeting, I found they had (as I had hoped) started without me. When I briefly explained why I was late, they could not have been more gracious. It was easy to look on their faces with gladness. Yet my time with Samantha, though unexpected, had tapped into an even deeper sort of gladness. Jesus has a special love for those of us who are broken, poor, or on the margins. When we are invited to intimately love those whom Jesus especially loves, it is a taste of the gladness of the gospel.

The third kind of face can be the most difficult. We experience two types of challenges with anonymous faces, those of people we don't know. The first is the way we tend to project onto people. It is far too easy to look at people and have our lust, envy, or judgment triggered. Our primal emotions, if we are putting words to them on our minds, frequently create thoughts we wouldn't want to say out loud: "What a nice butt!" or "I

wish I had hair like that!" or "What was he thinking with that shirt?" The habit of these unholy thoughts is, I suspect, a sin that plagues all of us. When we go into places with crowds, before we start gazing at faces, it's important to remind ourselves how easily our fellow human beings can trigger uncharitable thoughts. We need to attend to our thoughts, such that we become aware when our mind begins to teem with dehumanizing observations of our brothers and sisters.

We may need to hit the reset button. This often means practicing stewardship of the eyes, looking down at the ground and negotiating our way through the space without the temptation to judge others. It can be particularly helpful at this time to say to ourselves the Lord's Prayer, a few Hail Marys, the Jesus Prayer ("Lord Jesus Christ, son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner."), or a favorite piece of scripture. After a time, we may then be ready to look on our fellow human beings with gratitude, not judgment.

Twentieth-century philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstien wrote, "The face is the soul of the body." He reflects here a truth that the face is the fullest possible image on earth of our soul. Because this is so, and because our souls, by God's grace, can be eternal, what we look at in a human face is a shimmering of eternity in time. Our work as followers of Christ is to look at each human face as a PERSON. The word is purposefully written in all capital letters. Many translations of the Bible, including the New Revised Standard Version, show reverence for God by always covering the letters that refer to God's name with an all capital letters version of the word "lord." The letters JHWH refer to God's words to Moses from the burning bush.

Some choose to say the letters aloud as one of two names, either Jahweh or Jehovah. Following the lead of the NRSV and as a practice of reverence for God, I choose not to say those names of God aloud but know they are there when I see the word LORD. It is one way to honor the divinity of God.

Similarly, I encourage us to honor Christ in each PERSON we encounter. As part of the gentle practice of looking at each face, I repeat to myself two words that remind me of the PERSON's holiness. The first word is "theotropic," a real word even though my computer doesn't recognize it! Sunflowers are heliotropic. This means that the surface of the flower always tilts toward the place in the sky where it will receive the most sun. This is why, when you go past a field of sunflowers, they are tilting in the same direction. They are doing the thing that God created them to do. In a way similar to sunflowers and the sun, God created us to tilt toward God.

We were made in the image and likeness of God, each human being, with no exceptions. No matter how ugly, depressed, distracted, depraved, angry, judgmental, or mendacious a person appears to us, they are theotropic, created to tilt toward God like sunflowers tilt to the sun. Remembering this word, and believing it to be true of each face, shifts us.

The second word is enigma. I once read a review of a movie with one of my favorite actors. This actor is one of a handful of people who will motivate me to see a movie, even if I'm not convinced by the plot description. In this movie, she played a Russian spy with secrets. The reviewer said the film failed because, regardless of this actor's formidable gifts, the character

came across as a "cipher" and not an "enigma." A cipher is one on whom we project a flimsy and disposable set of assumptions. They appear as a shallow paste-up job out of our imaginations and our desires. An enigma, on the other hand, is a compelling mystery. The character-driven movies we return to repeatedly are filled with characters who are enigmatic. The actors have persuasively inhabited the lives of full human beings, with all of our contradictions, evasions, and depths.

This week's gentle practice is to look at each face and remember that the human face before us in any given moment is the face of a PERSON who is a theotropic enigma. Together, these words remind us that the person before us, whether a best friend or a stranger, is both known by us and unknown by us. As a person of faith who believes with scripture that we are each made in the image and likeness of God, we can also believe that the person before us is made in the image and likeness of God and desires to be one with God. This is true of us from the moment of our conception to, God willing, our partaking of eternal life at the heavenly banquet. Remembering this deep reality can be particularly powerful when we encounter someone who is mean, angry, or unpleasant. We know they have a desire for God within them, and we also humbly acknowledge that there is much we don't and cannot know. The person before us is a mystery to us, whose thoughts, joys, sufferings, vices, and virtues are known fully only to God. The practice is to refrain from claiming to know more than we possibly could of the human being before us.

Tanner found a way to perform this daily practice. He takes the bus into the city for his work as an insurance agent. The bus

has tinted windows, allowing him to look out at people without being seen in return. As part of his spiritual practice, Tanner looks at the faces of the people on the street and remembers the words that I have shared with you. He sees each PERSON as a theotropic enigma. By consciously naming the face of each person, he recognizes that they are made in the image of God, full of holy mystery.

One way we love God is to give the honor due God's name. We sing and pray the Name above all names and refer to the Source of all being, an incomprehensible mystery in whom we live and move and have our being. When it comes to God, we now see through a glass darkly, but in the age to come, we will, according to reliable Paul of Tarsus, see God face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12). We now see other human beings face to face. We don't have to wait for the life to be revealed to each of us after our death to see the faces of our family, friends, brothers, and sisters in Christ and the anonymous crowd. Those faces are there for us to gaze upon with wonder and gratitude. It is True with a capital "T" that each human being was made in the image and likeness of God, and so is, like you, a theotropic enigma. This week, look at each face and remember that each is a PERSON. See if remembering this truth makes your heart glad.

THIS WEEK

Look at each face and remember that they are a PERSON.

SHIFT

Practice stewardship of your eyes, particularly around people.

REPETITION

Each day, attend to the faces you see regularly, such as family, friends, and co-workers, and remember that each one is a PERSON.

CAMINO BOOTS

Commit to weekly worship and twenty minutes of prayer.



Saint Syncletica said: Just as a treasure exposed is quickly spent, so also any virtue that becomes famous or well publicized vanishes. Just as wax is quickly melted by fire, so the soul is emptied by praise, and loses firmness of virtue.



Abba Poemen said to Abba Joseph:
Tell me how I can become a monk.
And he replied: If you want to find rest here
and hereafter, say in every occasion, Who am
I? and do not judge anyone.

