



Sermon, January 10, 2021
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Junction City United Methodist Church

Rebinding What is Broken: The Nature of Religion

Scripture: Psalm 147:1-6

Praise the Lord!
How good it is to sing praises to our God;
for he is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting.
² The Lord builds up Jerusalem;
he gathers the outcasts of Israel.
³ He heals the brokenhearted,
and binds up their wounds.
⁴ He determines the number of the stars;
he gives to all of them their names.
⁵ Great is our Lord, and abundant in power;
his understanding is beyond measure.
⁶ The Lord lifts up the downtrodden;
he casts the wicked to the ground.

Jeremiah 31:31-34

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ³² It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, [\[a\]](#) says the Lord. ³³ But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Back in 2003, one of my favorite movies, *Secondhand Lions*, came out. In this movie, the character Hub, played by Robert Duvall, gives his speech about "what every boy needs to know about being a man" to young Walter, played by Haley Joel Osment. He says,

"Sometimes the things that may or may not be true are the things a man needs to believe in the most. That people are basically good. That honor, courage and virtue mean everything; that power and money ... money and

power mean nothing. That good always triumphs over evil. And I want you to remember this.... that love....true love never dies! Remember that boy ... remember that. Doesn't matter if it is true or not, a man should believe in those things, because those are the things worth believing in..... got that?"

"The things worth believing in." Religion and spirituality are all about "the things worth believing in." But over the past couple of decade, a lot of people have become disenchanted with what institutional religion has degraded itself into. It has become commonplace and even fashionable to separate out spirituality from religion, as if they were foreign substances to each other like oil and vinegar, that had over time accidentally found their way to each other and had gotten shook up together. Essentially a salad dressing for the soul, but now times and tastes have changed and a defatted dressing is the way to go, so let's just pour on the vinegar: spirituality without the superfluties and inconveniences of religion.

But the better analogy is to think of religion and spirituality as the sodium and chloride that are closely bound to each other as salt. In practice and principle, they can be separated, but not easily, and in fact, salt is not a simple combining of the atoms of sodium and chlorine. Each undergoes a change in order to become bonded to the other, and the new product of their joining – table salt – does not bear any resemblance to the individual elements that make it up.

Another way to think about the relationship between religion and spirituality is to consider religion to be the container or carrier of spirituality, like a chalice holding wine. The chalice carries and contains the wine, and without the chalice, the wine would spill out on the floor. The wine needs the chalice in order to be available for drinking. The purpose of the chalice is to contain the wine. Each are dependent upon the other. Religion is an essential part of spirituality as its carrier.

So let's be clear about this – religion and spirituality have grown up together, and like all siblings, have at times fought with each other, played with each other, confided in each other and tattled on each other. But forever related they remain.

As Hub puts it in *Secondhand Lions*, Religion and Spirituality are all about how we live according to the things that are most important to us. These things are *spiritual* in that they form us at the deepest places in our lives, and they provide for us a way of life steeped in meaning and significance.

Spirituality and Religion are about “the things worth believing in,” and then seeing how those beliefs play out in our lives.

Let’s begin with the word that some people want to get rid of or at least ignore, “religion.” It is actually an interesting word with a long history, but its Latin roots will suffice. It is made up of two smaller words, re-, which means to restore or go back to an earlier condition, and ligiô, from ligâre, which means to bind. Ligâre is related to words such as ligament, which binds muscles to bones, and lignin, the substance in plants that binds cells together. Thus, religion has to do with binding back together what has come unraveled. As the fabric of our world becomes more and more frayed, surely something is needed to repair its tears and mend its breaches (or breeches if you will.) That is the proper place for religion.

The idea of rebinding what is broken makes me think of when I was much younger, living at home with my family in Boise, Idaho. My next-in-line brother, Jeff, and I would gather up our stuffed toys into two cooperative gangs called the Hopsi Gang and Ding-Ding gang. These two gangs were part of the Fix-It Shop, run by the two Mr. Fix-it Men, whose purpose in life was to fix things, and make things better. Our arch nemesis was the Wreck-it Shop, whose purpose in life was to wreck things and make life worse for people. We had many hours of adventure doing wehat we could to fix the things that the Wreck-it Shop gang wrecked.

I’m not sure if we were totally aware of it at the time, but the idea of a Fix-it shop dedicated to fixing up what is broken in the world is a pretty good description of what religion is meant to be. Religions should be about fixing up all the broken people in all the broken places of the world.

Then there’s that other word, “Spirituality.” “Spirit” comes from the Latin spiritus, which is the noun form of the verb spirâre, “to breathe.” Spiritus originally meant “breath,” but came to refer to that force that animated or gave life to living things. Thus, it was more than simply taking in air – it referred to the unseen forces that made life possible – forces that were under the control of the gods or God. In Genesis, the Spirit is with God at creation, and hovers over the primordial waters. The psalmist says, “When you hide your face (all creatures) are dismayed; when you take away their *breath* they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your *spirit*, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground” (Psalm 104:29-30). Jesus tells his disciples that he will send the Comforter and Advocate,

the Holy Spirit to be with them and to lead them in all truth (John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:13-15). Paul speaks of the Spirit bearing witness to our spirits (Romans 8:16) and interceding for us when we don't know how to pray (Romans 8:26-27).

Spirituality, then, has to do with how we live our lives in relation to that which is both beyond us and within us, which empowers life, and which teaches us about that life and how to live it, in essence, how to live according to "the things worth believing in."

When Jesus refers to himself as the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14:6), he is speaking directly about how he embodied this deeper purpose-filled and significance-drenched aspect of life. Simply put, a Christian spirituality means to enter into the heart of Jesus, to explore his Way, his Life and his Truth, and to live it out in daily life. It is more than thinking correctly about doctrine or agreeing with religious ideas or statements. It is all about how we live our lives in the world, how we treat the members of our families, our co-workers, with what sort of integrity we go about living out our values and beliefs. Putting it another way, the integrity of our lives is reflected in how congruent our everyday actions are with what we believe.

The spirituality of Jesus is concerned with aligning one's heart with God's heart, and with living the life that arises out of that alignment. Jesus taught that if one had seen him, they had also seen the Father. So in order to understand the heart of God one must study and follow closely how Jesus lived his life, and to look to its congruity and integrity.

You know, our world is certainly in need of congruity and integrity. It has been under the influence of the Wreck-it Shop for far too long. Jesus came to show us the Way to Fix-up all the broken places of our world. He brought to us and taught us a Way of love to salve every wound, a pointed purpose to lift up and stand beside the downtrodden and oppressed, to defend those who were pushed aside by society, and to make a new family of humanity.

Here at Junction City United Methodist Church, we are beginning to reclaim our purpose to be "the Heart of JC," to be that place that is central to the rebinding of the broken places in Junction City, that place where people who have been hurt by abusive religion can be healed by compassionate religion, where wrecked lives can be fixed-up. As we look forward to regathering one day, let's keep our eyes focused upon our purpose for

gathering: to be the hands and feet and mouthpieces for the greatest Fix-it Person the world has ever seen, Jesus Christ our Lord.

So may it be.