

Homily – A Klutz Before Jesus

Rob Keim

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I am a klutz. I am clumsy. If there is a table corner, then I will bump into it. If I can spill or bobble something, then I will. I have no hand / eye coordination. If I play something with a ball, the ball beats me. You do not want me on your team for I am a klutz. Perhaps you are like me, or perhaps you know others who are also a klutz. I envy those of you that are coordinated and seem to have mastery over your body. I don't think I will ever stop being a klutz, and instead I focus on other things. Usually, I focus on the intellect or mind.

Now, two weeks ago, I started an online class that is offered by Richard Rohr's Center for Action and Contemplation. This is a fourteen week class called "Introduction to Wisdom Schools," and it is taught by an Episcopal Priest and spiritual leader named Cynthia Bourgeault. Some of you know Cynthia by her popular book on Centering Prayer. For the past two decades Cynthia has been focusing on wisdom and has established Wisdom Schools throughout the world. Three years ago, I had the pleasure of first hearing about Wisdom Schools when Cynthia taught at our annual clergy retreat.

Cynthia believes that throughout history, Wisdom Schools surface when the planet is going through great change or when human consciousness is going to take another leap forward. She believes that both of these conditions have been in place for the last few decades, let alone during the upheavals we have been experience during this time of Coronavirus. We are at a crossroad in our history. Don't you want to go in a direction in which wisdom leads us to Jesus? Don't you want to be transformed by wisdom not just for personal benefit, but for the sake of our planet?

The type of wisdom that Cynthia teaches is not about knowing more. Instead, it is about knowing with more of you. It is about going deeper with more parts of self. This type of wisdom is not about secret things. Instead, it is about receiving the things that already surround us. Cynthia calls this integrated knowing. And, it comes from two streams of Christian wisdom. The first stream is from St. Benedict in the fifth century. This first stream is based in the dessert fathers and mothers who were all about finding practices that let them put on the mind of Christ. The second stream is from 20th century Russian American spiritual guru, G.I. Gurdjieff. Gurdjieff is best known for introducing the Enneagram personality wisdom to the west. However, he spent most of his time re-introducing the west to mindfulness practices. Gurdjieff felt that those of us in the west spend way too much time in our heads, regurgitating the same cognitive knowledge without ever changing. In her Wisdom Schools Cynthia Bourgeault uses the integrated knowing methods of Gurdjieff to help us know with

more of our being. And, I am going to take us a bit deeper into that integrated knowing, but first I want to look at today's Gospel reading.

The Apostle Peter plays a prominent role in the New Testament and along with Jesus he is the central figure in today's Gospel reading. In the Bible, Peter is always listed first among the Twelve Apostles, and he is often depicted as a spokesperson for the group. After the arrest of Jesus, it is written that Peter denied knowing Jesus three times, but it is also written that Peter was the first male Apostle to whom Jesus showed himself after his resurrection. And as we heard in today's Gospel reading, Peter is the first to know and acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of the living God. In response Jesus gives Simon a new name, Peter, the name by which we know him today. There are different schools of thought about whether the renamed Peter is the rock and foundation of the church, or whether Peter's act of knowing Jesus as Messiah is the foundation of the church. I happen to subscribe to the latter school. For me the act of knowing Jesus is the foundation of our church. Be that as it may, our Apostolic tradition with Bishops being the foundation of our churches is traced back to Peter as the first Bishop of Rome. And, in that Apostolic tradition, our own Bishop Lucinda is American Episcopal bishop number one thousand one hundred and twenty-five.

Now, I want to spend the rest of this sermon looking at how we can begin to use the teachings of the Wisdom School to know Jesus. My assumption is that we all want to be like Jesus and that we want to know him, understand him and live into him.

Two weeks ago, in my sermon I shared some ideas that come from the wisdom of integrated knowing. Each and every one of us has a three-centered awareness of heart, mind, and body. There is wisdom in the emotions of our heart, in the thoughts of our minds, and in the kinesthetic moving centers of our bodies. Each person is predisposed towards one of these centers, but the goal is to have balance across all three – heart, mind, and body. And, if you are like me, then you rely way too much on the thinking of the mind. To my detriment, I am often oblivious to the emotions that control me.

But, there is a third center for us to know. For me, my least developed center is my kinesthetic knowing center. As I said earlier, I am a klutz. I bobble things and drop things and when I use a ball it beats me. Earlier I said that I choose to focus on the mind instead. I focus on what I am already good at. However, integrated knowing says that one must focus on the underdeveloped centers of knowing. So for me, I cannot ignore my moving center. I must develop it. Integrated knowing says that we are asleep when we utilize only one way of knowing. Deeper knowing, more fully knowing is balancing across the three centers of emotions, intellect and movement.

According to the Wisdom School, the moving center is “basically about intelligence through movements. It’s the way that our body is able to put its tentacles out and explore, and gain information from the world. It includes a wide range of skills, ranging from simple things, like knowing how to walk up stairs without having to look at every step. Something in your body knows how to measure and gauge distances. It includes, knowing how to walk at night. And, our movement center gives us the wonderful skills of imitation that allow us not only to learn to dance, but to learn to master a language, or learn an accent. It is that whole realm of things that we don’t do directly with our intellectual rational brain. You drive a car, you ski down a hill, you sail a boat. It gets into your body as muscle memory. That kind of intelligence, which we mostly underuse, is a huge reservoir of connectivity and information with the world.”

And, engaging the moving center can be as simple as bringing your attention to your feet. Go ahead and bring your mind’s eye to your feet. Focus on how they feel. Focus on how you are using them. You can even focus on how they look. Watch with wonder as you engage with your feet, or your hands or your breath. Paying attention to your body, for even short periods of time, can help activate your moving center.

Have you ever wondered why Christians seem to be so down on the body. We perceive it as dirty. We think that the source of evil is in the flesh. Somehow we think that spirituality is escape from the body. Somehow we think the body must be mastered or over-ridden before we can have any hope of spiritual attainment. However, we must remember that Christianity is the religion of incarnation. This means that the perfect union of spirit and matter was born into the world as a baby boy. As followers of Jesus it is time for us to reembrace the knowledge that we receive through our bodies. Our moving center can often give us understanding and cues that are missed by the head.

Now, I want to make a connection between our movement center and knowing Jesus as the Messiah. Cynthia Bourgeault shares a story about Metropolitan Anthony Bloom, a great Russian Orthodox abbot and bishop. In the story “a young fellow comes to the wise abbot and says, “Abba Anthony, my problem is I have no faith. I say these creeds about God and Jesus and they sound like impossible propositions. How can anyone believe this? How can you say the Nicene Creed? It’s ridiculous.

And, Anthony’s response to this was not what you might expect. He didn’t sit down and say, “Now, now, dear son. I am going to tell you why each of these things makes sense. Let me explain to you what it means” What he did instead is say, “Go home, and for a month do one hundred prostrations a day and then come back to see me.” Now, in the Orthodox tradition, a prostration is not for the faint of heart. It’s not that little bob and curtsy that we call reverencing in the Episcopal Church. Instead a

prostration is a daring gesture. It takes guts and it takes physical prowess." I tried to get Jeff to do a demonstration and he refused, so here goes.

That is not for the faint of heart, and I can tell you from personal experience that doing just ten of them, gets the heart rate going. The last time I saw a prostration in a worship service was this past January at the ordination of Bishop Lucinda. Deacons and Priests kneel for ordination, but Bishop's go down flat. Bishop Lucinda did just one prostration, but she was lying flat for a bit of time.

But, back to the story of the orthodox abbot. "When the fellow came back a month later, ten pounds lighter and in good physical shape, his eyes were glowing with faith. Anybody know why? If you don't know why, practice some prostrations. Go into your inner chamber and see what happens when you take that position. It's absolutely revolutionary. That is what the young man had discovered. In the movement of prostration, and in the gesture of oblation, is a position of utter humility. At the same time it is a position of utter safety. Rather than teetering, precariously trying to stand up, you're just there. The ground holds you. You're making contact. You're learning the language of self-offering. Your movement center comes into play. Something inside your body knows how to do this movement and gesture. Something in your movement center wants to do it. And, for some reason, in the movement you recognize Jesus.

That was the missing piece for the young man. By the time he returned to the abbot, the man had begun to experience where faith lives in the moving center. Then he realized that the repetitive movements weren't the chore that he thought. The intellectual center is wrong when it dismisses the wisdom in movement. When we engage our underdeveloped centers of knowing we see that the intellect doesn't have all the answers. The abbot was teaching the young man that it isn't about having to examine all these individual propositions about Jesus in the creed and decide whether I agree or not. That would be the view based on the intellectual center. The moving center taught him that there was something deeper going on under it, and it was movement and gesture that the young man needed before he could decode the creedal language about Jesus.

In this way, we too can learn to know more deeply about Jesus. God has created us with a three-fold way of knowing, and Jesus reveals God, especially to those who are balance across these three ways of knowing. I hope you are curious to know more about Wisdom Schools and the three-centered knowing. I hope you are eager to know Jesus as Messiah.