

Welcome New Truth

A sermon based on Luke 6:28-43 and *Soul Talk* by Kirk Byron Jones

Even though we took off last week for 30 Hour Famine, and even though General Conference was last week, and even though it's Transfiguration Sunday, we're still talking about Soul Talk. This is our last Sunday with this book and this sermon series on listening to your soul. The topic of this last chapter is "Welcome New Truth."

Welcome new truth.

What a skill to be focusing on this Sunday.

Before we get to this skill, let's walk back through what we've learned with this sermon series. We've learned what soul talk is, and how important it is. We've learned how to sit with the deepest parts of ourselves, how to sit in the quiet and set aside the things that weigh us down. We learned how to listen deeply to ourselves and how to listen bravely to what we hear. We learned how to be honest with ourselves and gentle with ourselves.

These are not small things.

It is a challenge to do that first step of routinely finding quiet.

It is a challenge to set aside the things that we care deeply about so that we can sit with ourselves and our God.

It is a challenge to actually listen during those times, to really listen to the Spirit of God inside us. It's a challenge to face up to what the Spirit says. It's a challenge to be honest about what we hear. It's a challenge to be gentle with ourselves.

But when we do these things, when we've practiced listening and listening with openness (which is what all these steps are asking us to do), we *will* hear new truth. Because when we do these things, we are inviting God to speak to us and we know our God is faithful. If we practice soul talk, God *will* start talking to us.

So what do we do when God starts talking? We welcome new truth. We welcome the new ideas that God brings to us to help us grow, to help us live life abundant. That's what Jesus calls us to. God wants us to live our fullest lives, our most abundant lives. We learn how to do that during soul talk. Maybe we're shown new dreams we could pursue. Maybe we're shown old ideas that we need to let go. Jones talks about this in terms of "grabbing hold of what your soul grabs onto" and "making space for your new self." We do all this, grabbing onto new dreams and clearing out space for them, because God is preparing us for joy, for that abundant life.

The caution, of course, is that this preparation may not look like joy at first. That's why we must be honest and brave and gentle and welcoming. God is faithful and God is working for our good and God is speaking to our souls and we have to remember all that because sometimes, what God is doing will not look like joy.

Jo Schonewolf, preached at Salem UMC, 03-03-19

So that's soul talk. Getting quiet, letting go, listening deeply and bravely and honestly and gently, and welcoming what we hear. This is what we do when we talk to God, when we do our best to allow the deepest parts of ourselves to connect to the source of our being, of all that is, to the one who is making all things new, and the one that brings us abundant life. It is a challenge but it is worth it.

Now that we know the process, let me give you an example of how soul talk has worked in my own life.

I struggle to find quiet. I haven't had success waking up in time to have some quiet and I fall asleep almost as soon as I get home, so seeking quiet at my house is a hard. But, every day, I have to get in my car and drive somewhere. So until my life settles down a little, I have transformed my commute into my quiet space. I get in the car and I drive away from my obligations to school and church and family and friends and my roommates and my partner and I let my Jeep Grand Cherokee with its janky window and dim headlights be the place that my soul can meet my God.

I listen as deeply as I can to God. Sometimes I spend time unburdening myself before God, but usually I hold the silence and listen for what comes. I listen with openness. As I process what I hear throughout the rest of the day, I do it with as much bravery and gentleness as I can.

And that's so hard for me. I'm a perfectionist, so when God tells me that I have some growing to do, I will tear myself to pieces for being less than what God wants me to be. If I'm not careful, new truth will be something that I welcome with dread, because with it will come an entire day of what I call the Litany of Terrible Thoughts. The Litany of Terrible Thoughts tells me that I'm useless and broken and unworthy and lazy and irredeemable, and that's just the first line. I know it's not true, but the Litany can turn soul talk into a hill I have to climb, and it is hard work to climb it. But I know that when I get to the top, my God will speak to my soul, and so I climb it each time, whether or not I have to listen to the Litany of Terrible Thoughts along the way.

Now, perfectionism and a tendency toward self-loathing may not be what hinders you in soul talk. I pray to God it's not. But all of us have a hill to climb, big or small, in order to get to God. It might be that laying your burdens down is near impossible for you. It may be that your pride gets in the way. It may be that you've never heard God speak before and you sincerely doubt that God's going to start now. It's okay if that's the case. It's okay if you struggle. That's normal. But I would encourage you to keep trying no matter what your struggle is, because we've come to a time when all of us are going to need to do some heavy soul talk.

I needed some soul talk after General Conference. It was so hard for me to watch this denomination that nurtured me, taught me to love music and to look for God everywhere, choose a way of closed doors instead of open ones, to know the harm that is done in exclusion and to choose to do it anyway. And of course, I was already exhausted at the beginning of General Conference. Seminary is a marathon that you run at sprint pace and I was looking for some relief, some comfort, and some hope once General Conference was over, some clarity

about the future might hold for me and how and where I would serve God. But we live in interesting times with shifting dynamics and clarity and peace are not what came out of General Conference. When I went to do my soul talk, driving home from work while the cold wind whistled through my broken window, I mostly screamed.

But Jones tells us something wise about soul talk. He says, "Notice when your soul insists. Pay careful attention to repeated messages, to guidance you may hear expressed differently but which carries the same certain message. Hearing and heeding such guidance can offer... relief sufficient enough to rival the sometimes necessary pain of transformation."

In the days since General Conference, the message that I have gotten over and over again, no matter how tired or disappointed or hurt I am, is that there is still work to do. That's the new truth that I have to welcome into my life, the result of my soul talk over the past few days: there is still work to do.

It's fitting that today is Transfiguration Sunday, because this is the day when we remember that we know what God looks like, so we know what our work looks like. It's the day in the church year when we remember how God was revealed in Jesus. See Jesus, after he had set his face toward Jerusalem, toward the journey to the cross, his death, and the Resurrection, told his disciples what was going to happen. Jesus knew the pain that was about to come, but he also knew about the new life on the other side of it, and he wanted the disciples to know what was going to happen. Only, they didn't hear that last part. They heard that he must suffer and die and they rejected that idea. What would they do if Jesus died?

Maybe that's why he took three of his closest disciples up that mountain, a week or so after he told them what's to come. Maybe he needed to show them what they couldn't hear.

Up on the mountain, Jesus shone. Even as he was talking with Moses and Elijah about the pain that lay ahead of him, light poured out of his face, out of his clothes, from everywhere around him. Up on the mountain, the disciples saw the full glory of God revealed in Jesus, and though it frightened them at first, Peter eventually realized the truth about this moment of transformation. He realizes it and he says it out loud: "It is good for us to be here."

It is good for us to be here too. It is good for us, today, to be in this place, seeing what we see, knowing what we know. Because we know Jesus. In Jesus, we see the full glory of God. In Jesus, we see someone who spent so much time sitting at the table with publicans and sinners, with the rejected, that he was called a glutton and sinner and rejected himself. We see the full glory of God in Jesus, who sought out those who had been left out, who tells the parable of 99 sheep left behind in search of the one lost one. We see the full glory of God in Jesus, who sought so much to transform the world that the world killed him. We see the full glory of God in Jesus, who could not be contained by the tomb. It is good for us to see that, to believe that, just as it was good for the disciples to see Jesus shining on the mountain. We know that with every loss, there is a resurrection.

But of course, as always, you don't stay on the mountain. No matter how glorious the sight, you go back to where the work is, where people need healing and hope and comfort, where people need to know that there is more to this world than despair and the way things are. You go because there's still work to do.

But, we don't have to do the work alone. We together are the Body of Christ, the only one that he has on this earth, and as Paul tells us, we are being transformed to be more like Christ, more like this Jesus who we see drawing everyone he can into an ever-wider circle of hope and care and compassion. When we do that, when we as the Body of Christ love like Jesus loved, we shine like Jesus shone.

I know deep down that this way, this way of working to love as Jesus loved, is the way that I have to go. It's the way that the scriptures guide me. It's the way my tradition points me. It's the way that my soul tells me to go when I do the work of sitting down and listening to it and being bold to hear it and accept what it says. And it is this guidance of my soul that I pray will keep me going through this painful time of transformation in the Body of Christ. I don't know what comes next. But I do know the work that I'm called to do: to love as Jesus loves so that the glory of God can shine all the brighter throughout this world. And I know that there's so much work to do.