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The Brave Space

Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised.

The beauty of Christian Community is that we stand together in what I call “The Brave Space.”

The Brave Space is the space that holds both suffering and celebrating, sadness and joy, fear and faith. This is the whole picture of life, the reality of our experience.

While we know we would much prefer our lives to be smooth, unruffled, joy-filled, with our families and those we love always healthy and safe at the same time we also know that life doesn't work that way. We get both the sadness and joy together. Triumph and protests happening on the same day. We walk through suffering and celebrating – at the same time. The Brave Space is the space where we live in joy and in sorrow with ourselves, with others and with Christ.

I am sure there are examples of Brave Spaces that you can recall and that you have been part of in this Christian Community. Since I do not yet know your stories, I will share one from my previous parish. It is a story that is well known in the parish so I am not revealing any personal information and it is a story that I am guessing will sound familiar to many here.

Kelie was first diagnosed with brain cancer when she was a freshman in high school. Her family was not a member of the parish and many families from St. John's knew Kelie and her family through the local school. Over the five years that Kelie was in treatment, numerous parish people helped and prayed. Friends,

teachers, moms, dads. And so much of what they did made a huge difference for support and love. They were in the Brave Space because the diagnosis was not promising. They held out joy when it was possible while never denying the sorrow and uncertainty. A smaller handful of people were the closer into the center of the Brave Space because they were the emergency go-to people. They traveled the highs and lows paths. They were at the hospital and the chemo treatments. They experienced with the family all the devastating disappointment and threads of hope in terminal illness. When Kelie did die, in her freshman year in college, The Brave Space remained. Overwhelming loss and sorrow alongside the connection of concern, caring and love. All held together because those members from our parish believed that in the Christian life, in Christian community, sorrow and joy live together; Faith is alive in the presence of fear. This is the reality of life and life with God. They did not look at only part of the picture. They looked at the whole picture.

I am sure this Christian Community has a Brave Space story.
We do not need to hesitate to see the Gospel message among us in our stories.

Jesus, in this morning's Gospel passage, opens the door to Brave Space:
From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised.

The first phrases of this verse is the door hinge for Matthew's gospel message. You might recall that prior to this passage, Peter has just confessed that Jesus is the Messiah. All the teaching Matthew has laid out in the preceding 15 Chapters culminates in Peter pronouncing the identify of Jesus and his mission. Now the text says, "**From that time on** Jesus began to **show** his disciples...". From that time on is a hinge that move Jesus from teaching to showing that the Christian life hold both joy and suffering – the Christian followers embrace of whole story.

But what Jesus must show the disciples is not what Peter, or we would prefer. Life is not going to be rich, and wholesome, and unruffled, and smooth. Instead the journey to Jerusalem for Jesus means arriving into suffering. The journey to Jerusalem means the whole picture of Jesus mission of life, death and resurrection. That also means for those who follow there will also be the whole

picture of life in Christ is really like. The disciples must enter the Brave Space of reality of joy and sorrow together if they are to be disciples of Jesus.

I believe that embracing the whole of Jesus' life and the whole of our lives is what it means to lose our life in order to find it in Christ. Discipleship is joy and gratitude and comfort and healing and blessing. Yet experiencing only these dimensions of following Christ means we are living in an unreal world.

As we experience joy we cannot skip over the challenges, the places that make us extremely uncomfortable and sad, the places that we do not want to go. The joy and the sorrow is right before us in the Brave Space. Jesus tells us to step in. That is moving from unreal to real. That is losing an unreal view of life and taking up the real.

There is no shortage of examples around us about moving from the unreal to the real and stepping into the Brave Space. Racial, Political, Environmental for a beginning. And, there are always relationships within families and with our selves that could have more growing space if we are willing to bring our whole selves to the whole experience of life.

There are two ways to begin.

The first focus is our inner life. What are my reference points, preferences, feeling and opinions. We need to know what they are. However, Peter's reliance on only his point of view is exactly what causes Jesus to use the strong words "get behind me Satan." Peter is relying only his understanding of what Jesus' ministry should look like. Jesus is starting TO SHOW his disciples another way. Jesus challenge to Peter is to let go of his normative point of reference and look to a larger view.

To look at our inner life as preparation to to enter the Brave Space, we can ask ourselves what do I need to expand? What might be preventing me from seeing another person's point of view?

The second focus our group. This can be church, community, ethnic group, and even nation. Again, the same set of reflections are helpful. To avoid seeing the world only through these shared understandings and values, we can take a step

back are ask – what are our values, perspectives and group identity. Might some of these be preventing us from seeing another point of view?

This is where I believe Christian Community has the most power for good. When we ask these questions **together, the Holy Spirit is among us. Christ's life is with us.** We ask and search and discern and plan for actions not only based on our group values. We create new values and new perspectives. We enter the Brave Space with the best understanding we can have about how our life in Christ needs to be lived NOW.

The story about Kelie is a story about how people learned together in Christian Community how to be present, helpful, and prayerful over five long years in the reality of terminal cancer. The people who stepped into the Brave Space of the reality of cancer did not have a method or formula. They learned as they went along. They learned together how they were a power for good.

The whole of life experience in joy and sorrow, in pain and comfort, in faith and fear. Entering the Brave Space that is before us. With Christ's help we can and we will.