

Sermon
John 20:19-31
2 Easter-B Sunday, April 11, 2021
Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Coos Bay, Oregon

What's a really effective way to get someone to do something?

(Yawn)

...at its base level, like me yawning, the power of suggestion is the psychological process by which one person influences the thoughts, feelings or behavior of someone else. So that's one way to get someone to do the thing you want them to do.

Then there's one of my favorites: reverse psychology.

When my nephew, Ryan, was about three, I remember trying to get him to taste something that he said he didn't like. No amount of "just taste it, you'll like it" or "you won't have to eat it if you don't like it" would work. Finally, I said, "oh, that's right! You probably won't like it because it's too hot for you."

So what does he do? Immediately he responds, "No, it's not too hot for me!"

And gobbles down the food.

Whether you consciously knew it or not, you parents have most likely used reverse psychology in raising your own children.

Reverse psychology is a technique involving the advocacy of a belief or behavior that is opposite to the one desired, with the expectation that this approach will encourage the subject to do what actually IS desired: the opposite of what is being suggested. This technique relies on the psychological phenomenon of reactance, in which a person has a negative emotional reaction to being persuaded, and so chooses the option which is being advocated against. Pretty tricky.

Reverse psychology is often used on children because they have a high tendency to respond with reactance, since they often feel threatened that their freedom is being stifled.

Keep these phenomena in mind as we return to today's gospel.

No one expects the risen Christ...

The way the writer Mark tells it in his gospel – the women run away in terror and we don't read of them telling anyone!

The story we read from Luke has the women being terrified, but after being reassured by the two angels, ran to tell the disciples, who then didn't believe them. Peter eventually went to check out the tomb on his own, but afterwards went home, where he sat in amazement.

And in the gospel of John, which we read last week, Mary Magdalene runs back from the empty tomb to tell the disciples. Of course, they don't believe her and have to go check for themselves.

So in our gospel reading today, we have the disciples gathered together, probably because there is strength in numbers – they’re scared, and more likely than not, they’re still talking about Jesus’ death and what might happen to themselves. They’re terrified, sitting behind locked doors.

But Jesus finds a way in. No door can lock him out. Think about any of the recent school shootings. The Sandy Hook shooting of Kindergarteners is one that always comes up for me. It never fails, whenever a shooting occurs, in response, some people resurrect the “whole prayer in public school” debate. They’ve suggested that these massacres happen because America is a “God-forsaken” place that has taken God out of the schools. To which I point to today’s gospel – God can never be removed or taken out of anyplace where God wills God to be... And just to follow up, we know that God WAS with those who survived and with those who died on that December day in Connecticut when they were terrified and when they needed God most.

God, in the form of Jesus, was with the disciples on this day, when they were terrified, when they needed him most.

I imagine that the disciples are still processing the last few days’ events. Why did Jesus have to die? We had thought he was the Messiah! These disciples are a bit slow growing into their resurrection faith. They’ve been traumatized and no one expects to see the risen Christ. But God’s peace gently breaks into their despair. And Thomas is the one who raises the question that they all – heck, WE all want to ask. Jesus, will you show me? I need to see it to believe it! Ever since, Thomas has been made to be the bad guy. But for some reason, he wasn’t with the others the first time Jesus appeared to his disciples. You can almost imagine Jesus, pronouncing peace on his disciples and then stopping himself...“Whoa, wait, where’s Thomas? We can’t start without him!” And now, it’s a week later. Thomas asks the question he gets remembered for...fair enough, but I think he just wanted what the others had, a first-hand look at Jesus. He just wanted to see for himself what the others saw rather than rely on this wild tale his friends had told him. Thomas wanted tangible evidence.

Remember, these same disciples didn’t believe Mary that first Easter morning. They, too wanted tangible evidence to believe

Sometimes, we need that same tangible reassurance from God. I think that’s why our sacraments include something we can taste, see and feel. They are the visible gifts of God...That tangible evidence that God is present and loves us, still.

David Lose, the Luther Seminary professor suggests this exercise...bear with me, it will be fun. Turn to the person next to you at home. And if you’re alone, just imagine talking with someone next to you in line at the post office or grocery store...or your best friend. Tell them what type of toothpaste or cleaner you use and why...you have a minute each...go!

Okay, so you just got a taste of sharing something personal...

Sharing our faith is like that. It’s really just sharing our own story about something personal, and why we do what we do... It’s not so hard, really.

There is a man named Bob in my home congregation who has been handed some really hard things to cope with. His only son was killed in Viet Nam, his wife left him shortly after the funeral, he began drinking, lost his job and is crippled by horrible arthritis. Still, his faith remains strong. Over the years, folks have asked him how he remains so positive, how he gets through each day – He always says that “I know that my life is in God’s hands, no matter what.” He always credits God. He enjoys sharing his faith with others.

Sharing our own stories should be heartfelt, and it doesn’t have to be scary. To Bob, it was the most natural thing – and it should be that way with us.

I wonder if any of you remembered the last line of my Easter sermon from last week? I had said that after hearing her name Mary did ran to proclaim to the others what she had seen. You have been named to proclaim. How many of you did that?

But wait! I just remembered that I started this morning’s sermon with a story about my nephew, Ryan, and the use of reverse psychology.

The gospel writer Luke recalls that after performing a miracle or after his teaching, Jesus often repeated this line...Don’t tell anyone.

So taking a cue from Jesus, I beg of you. Don’t go out and teach. Don’t speak to anyone in the name of Jesus. Don’t you dare go out and share your stories with even one other person!

Amen.