

Gracious, generous creator- your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven. Amen.

Good morning! It is so good to be here with you this morning. If we have not met yet, my name is Cami, and I am delighted to have the opportunity to learn with and from you as your seminarian this year!!

Phew- this is a tough text! Before we really jump in, I just want to name the elephant in the room, yes- Jesus is talking about slavery, and the treatment of slaves. Further, he calls on us to put ourselves in the story as slaves.

Without assuming that I can speak for Jesus, I want to help us to have a clearer picture of what this meant in this particular context before we move on. While I do not believe that Jesus would have subscribed to the institution of slavery, and in fact all of his teachings are contrary to the rules of such a system, as he is speaking to his disciples, he is speaking to people who would have understood the life of slavery and indentured servitude, and thereby, really understood what Jesus was *really* asking them to do by offering themselves as a servant.

While reading biblical text, it is important to really try to understand the cultural context that it was written in.

Let's dig in!

When I was little, there was a lady at church who used to find us after church- Mrs. Gonzales. Every week, after dismissal, we would do our best to spot her, and try to do whatever we had to do to avoid her. We always failed.

MMMMM!!!! Look at that delicious elbow! ... and that ear!!!!... so delicious!!!

No matter how hard we tried to hide from her, she always found us, and was always elated at how wonderful every part of us tasted. "Do you know that you are wonderfully made? Do

you know that you are a master piece? One of God's greatest creations?!?...Mmmmm.... So good!"

It was funny when we were little, and, as you can imagine, the novelty of it began to wear off as we grew into pre-teen years.

I was no longer wondering how wonderful my left knee pit tasted... though of course, it would have been exquisite, I am sure!

Mrs. Gonzales was was part of everything, one of the life-long parishioners who had done a bit of everything. She made tamales, burritos and tacos for the church fundraiser more years than she could count.

Her faithful wisdom, and burning love for Jesus has been part of a foundation of a faith-lead life for hundreds of children, their children, and now, grandchildren.

Her funeral cookies have comforted many families in times of deep grief and vulnerability, including mine. The first to get to every potluck, (after cooking all night, or course!), and the last to put the mop down at the end. The one who organized the meal train, even before you went into the hospital, and met you there to hold your hand.

Do you know a Mrs. Gonzales?

Now while I do not recommend "tasting" the youth, as we are in different times, and I can't imagine that it is "safe-church sanctioned", Mrs. Gonzales "got it".

With no high school diploma, not a college education to speak on, no board of directors to lead... no vacation home, or 401K to check on... she got it, and she had status and riches that made her full of joy, light and life.

Mrs. Gonzales participated in a counter economy. She flipped the script.

You see, she understood that we are all called to be servants for each other by way of leaning into being a follower of Jesus- to *love audaciously*, by allowing the grace, the light, the peace and the spirit of God to work through her, to the service of those around her.

Oooo! That was too good not to repeat! Hear me say that again!...

She followed Jesus by loving audaciously—allowing the grace, the light, the peace and the spirit of God to work through her, to the service of those around her.

Today's Gospel is part of a literary trope that we have heard over the last several weeks, where by Jesus is charging us to... flip the script.

Here is what we have heard:

- ✓ So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all of your possessions
- ✓ I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.
- ✓ You cannot serve God and wealth."
- ✓ If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."

And today...

- ✓ So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, `We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!'"

In these Gospel lessons, Jesus is saying... "Here is how you follow me.."

- by giving everything up that gets between us.
- Yes, that means to love everyone- *even* the sinner.
- and, "Yes, your love for money, power and status gets in between you and me."

My friends, I am tired. I am tired of worrying about if my child will come back home from school, or the day she is afraid to come to church because she heard about what happened in that church last week... or the week before... or... the week before that . I am heart broken for the migrant families that are hunted down in our streets, or pulled out of their beds at night, and torn apart. I am so angry. I am angry about seeing armed border patrol boats patrolling the Chicago River, and for my neighbors who serve us by working for the federal government, only to be used as political pawns, while they have to figure out how to feed their families and pay the mortgage.

And quite frankly, as a gay Latina who's marriage is seen as a topic for debate and as leverage for political gain... and who is seeing people who look like me beat up in the streets and other times... just disappeared... I am scared.

It is so easy to stay tired. Worried. Heart broken. Angry... scared. To bury our heads... to point fingers and yell... or worse, to be apathetic to our neighbors.

My siblings, you are created for good, by the ultimate Good, and thereby the grace of God, have received the ultimate riches. We are called to flip the script, and participate in a counter-economy.

My friend- You are created ...

In love.

By love.

Of love and

FOR.. love.

It is in acting on the goodness in which we were created, and acting in service to others, that we are able to heal ourselves and each other from brokenness. Through this we are intertwined in our connection with the risen Christ that dwells within each of us

Today we celebrate the feast day of St. Francis, a servant to left it all, to love and serve all of God's holy creation.

Born to a wealthy family in Italy, he enjoyed a life of luxury. While praying at church, Jesus spoke to St. Francis saying, "Francis, rebuild my church, which, as you see, is falling down". After receiving this call from God, he got rid of all distractions, and chose to live a life of poverty- removing anything from his life that might distance him from God. He committed to a love and reverence for all of God's creation, praising God the Artist in everyone of God's works, viewing all living things as brothers and sisters. In fact, he went through the streets inviting everyone to sing with him to praise God for his beautiful creations.

As he did St. Francis, Jesus calls US to audacious love. We are called to flip the script, having faith in an abundant love that inspires us to serve one another, unabashedly.

We are called to serve as instruments of God's peace:

To sow love where there is hatred— by holding each others' hearts with gentle compassion by getting involved with Real Talk.

To pardon, where there is injury— by working to understand the lens with which other's navigate this complex world with by joining our first cohort of Sacred Ground.

To have faith, where there is doubt— by getting involved with the refugee ministry and witnessing the kind of redemption that only comes from faith.

To sow hope, where there is despair— by planting a burning love for Jesus in volunteering to work with our youth, and being open to their joy healing your heart. And by giving generously to the Capitol Campaign to ensure that St. Dunstan's will continue to inspire followers of Jesus' to share his radical love for generations to come.

To bring light where there is darkness— by volunteering with St. Stephen's and the Incarnation Episcopal church in DC to help be a lookout for ICE agents so that our siblings can be fed with spiritual food.

And joy, where there is sadness—by getting involved with the liturgy as a lector, a LEM, an usher or the alter guild, who make this celebration together a time of fellowship, healing and love.

Let us pray...

Dear God of abundant joy, light, grace and love-

grant that we may not so much seek

to be consoled as to console,

to be understood as to understand,

to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

My friends, it is _____, and you are loved.... Now

go out, and do likewise.

Amen.