

When I study Scripture, I sometimes turn to an old-school habit: I deconstruct the sentences. It's a kind of grammatical parsing—probably not exactly the textbook process, but it helps me get closer to the heart of the passage. What I do is ask questions of the text, one phrase at a time.

Take today's passage from Romans:

- Jesus leads us. (ok, where?)
- Into a place of radical grace. (but, why?)
- Because it's there that we can celebrate the hope of experiencing God's presence. (And why celebrate that?)
- Because the wonder of God's holy company never disappoints. (But how do we know?)
- Because when we experience it, the Holy Spirit floods our hearts with love.

We can do the same with part of today's Gospel reading. John says:

- The Spirit will come. (why?)
- to guide us. (where?)
- Into all truth.

Here is the Patty Fox translation of both these texts, based on this exercise in deconstruction:

Jesus shows us what grace looks like—radical, generous, real.

And in experiencing that sacred acceptance, we find ourselves rejoicing.

And it's not a shallow celebration; it comes from deep within—because God's love meets our deepest longings. And the Spirit, the presence of the Divine here on earth, helps us perceive what is true and floods our hearts with that love.

Parsing Scripture can help us think more deeply about what we're reading. But so can listening to those who have walked with God for many years.

Last week, I stopped in Brunswick to visit Shirley at the assisted living home where she's moved. She greeted me with her typical bright smile and we talked about many things, and when the conversation turned to prayer, I was moved by her insight. I asked Shirley how she usually prays. She said, “Well, first, I just say, I'm here! Just to let God know. And then—I listen.”

I told her that her approach reminded me of the passages I'd been reading for this Sunday, and then I described how it says that the Spirit floods our hearts with love and guides us in truth. Without missing a beat Shirley nodded and said “Oh yes. That's true. I don't presume to know what God wants. Instead of asking for something, I just listen and the truth is always made clear.”

Reflecting on that conversation, I found myself thinking about a book that shaped me when I was young. I was 22 when I met my first female pastor and I learned a lot from her as a mentor. The Rev. Pansie Evers taught me how to embody God's love in ministry. And she taught me that sharing love begins with receiving it first, because we can only give what we ourselves have received.

She gave me this book, *A Testament of Devotion* by Thomas R. Kelly who was a Quaker Philosopher and minister, and it changed my life. This week, I pulled it from the shelf and read it again, and I learned something I hadn't noticed before: Kelly spent his summers right here in Maine near Pemaquid Lighthouse – a place Lianne and I especially enjoy and have visited frequently. I once drove all the way to Pennsylvania just to stand outside the retreat center where Kelly once taught. And here I've unknowingly walked his summer paths for the past three years.

Kelly's language for God is beautiful. He writes of:

- The Divine Center
- A Speaking Voice
- The Presence in the Midst
- The Inward Living Christ
- The Abiding Light behind all changing forms

Like Shirley, Kelly came to understand that prayer is not about controlling the conversation: “We cease trying to make ourselves the dictators and God the listener,” he writes, “and become the joyful listeners to the [One] who does all things well.”

Kelly gives advice to those seeking a deeper spiritual life suggesting that we: “Walk and talk and work and laugh with friends. But behind the scenes, keep up the life of simple prayer and inward worship.”

His words remind us that the spiritual life is not separate from ordinary living, but woven through it—grounded in prayer, shaped by love, and open to transformation. This kind of life reflects the living rhythm of the Holy Trinity: Love creating life, receiving loss, and rising in newness. The threefold movement of the Divine in the world where...

- a radical grace
- a deep gratitude,
- an easing of longing.
- And an overflowing love are incorporated.

So today I ask:

What would parsing your life look like? Not a parsing shadowed by guilt or pressure, but with grace and curiosity. A parsing that asks the questions that matter such as:

- Where is Christ leading me right now?
- Into what kind of grace am I being invited?
- What truth am I being called to hear—especially the hard or uncomfortable truth?
- And where is the Spirit stirring hope or love in places I thought were dry or done?

Parsing our lives like this doesn't mean overanalyzing every decision. It means noticing the movement of God in our ordinary days. It means pausing long enough to discern whether the words we speak, the choices we make, and the priorities we live by are aligned with the deeper call of the Abiding Light.

And friends, that call is urgent. Because we live in a time when truth is contested, hope is fragile, grace is rare, and love is too often conditional. As we watch fear and division gain ground, and the public square becomes more and more charged with anger and mistrust, the temptation is to harden our hearts or pick a side and dig in. But – The Presence in the Midst, The Inward Living Christ – invites us to something deeper. Not avoidance, not aggression, but courageous listening. Spirit-led truth-seeking. Hope-rooted action and radical love.

What’s required of us is attentiveness—a readiness to say, like Shirley, “I’m here.” And then the patience to listen. This is the work that we are called to, and it is no small thing because that work has an impact that goes far beyond ourselves.

Contemporary Sufi teacher Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee writes in his book The Bond with the Beloved about the power of devotion in our time:

“As we silently work upon ourselves, (he says) the energy of our devotion becomes a point of light in the world... In previous ages this energy was held in sacred places—stone circles, temples, cathedrals. In this next stage of our evolution, it is the hearts of individuals that will hold the cosmic note of the planet. This note—this joy—is being infused into the world. It is the heartbeat of the world. And it needs to be heard in our cities and towns.”

May our devotion increase light, in a world that has lost its way, as we follow Christ into the depths of radical grace, and listen as the Spirit guides us through the unfolding of sacred truth. Amen.