

Transfiguration  
Dallas, Texas

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Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Psalm 119:1-8

1 Corinthians 3:1-9

Matthew 5:21-37

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I recently heard about something funny coming from the Transportation Safety Administration. Yes, the TSA, that same bunch of wonderful folks who force us to nearly disrobe in the airport, and who now can choose to give us full-body pat-downs. I'm not sure if it's still up, but a few years ago in the airport in Milwaukee, the TSA put up a sign that you see after you've moved through the metal detectors and body-screeners and pat-down areas. When you get to the other side of all that, there is a sign that says, "Recombobulation Zone."

You leave behind the area where you remove your shoes and belt, empty your pockets, pull everything out of your bag, and generally undo everything you worked so hard to do earlier that day—the place some have politely nicknamed the "Discombobulation Zone"—and enter the "Recombobulation Zone" where you get to put it all back together again. I'm not entirely sure that "recombobulation" qualifies for the Oxford English Dictionary, but I like very much the idea of a place where you are safe to put the pieces back together again, a place where you get to recuperate from the frustration and confusion and dysfunction of so much of life. Who knew that the TSA could come up with something like that?

At its heart, the act of worship is like a "Recombobulation Zone" for Christians. It is the time when we pause from our routines, from our work and chores and schedules, and gather together to make our prayers and listen to God's Word and sing God's praises. Worship is when we are given a respite from the hustle and bustle of life, when we can sit in awe before our Maker and Redeemer. The Church is like God's "Recombobulation Zone." We are calmed, we are fed, and then we are sent on our way.

But the recombobulation isn't supposed to stay here. In fact, we're making a bit of a mistake if we think we can come here for a quick fix of music and prayers and liturgy, and then go back out into our lives and pretend as though nothing is different. If we're nursing hurts and wounds and pain when we come here, the feeling of peace we get in here will only be a lovely bit of escapism unless we let God lead us back out into the world so we can do something to heal it.

In the middle of the Sermon on the Mount, that most comprehensive set of teachings and wisdom from Jesus in all of the gospels, Jesus says, "When you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift." What he's saying is that he wants us to be recombobulated! But he wants us to be every bit as recombobulated

out there as we are in here, and he knows that is only truly possible if we begin forgiving people who've hurt us, and making amends to the people we've hurt, and confronting all those places of brokenness and pain that lurk in the back of our minds and hearts when we kneel in here to make our prayers.

Because it is dishonest to stand in here and say the Peace of the Lord be always with you if there are people out there we refuse to be at peace with. It is dishonest to accept the words of absolution after the confession if there are people out there we refuse to forgive. Jesus teaches that you can't really experience one without the other. Which is why when he teaches us how to pray – you know, the prayer we call the Lord's prayer, the prayer we say more than any other – he has us say, "Forgive us our trespasses, just as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Yes, he wants us to be recombobulated, and that is going to happen out there every bit as much as it will in here.

To make sense of the rest of what Jesus has to say to us today, I want to go back to that Recombobulation Zone in the airport. You know when you go through airport security there's that long list of things you can't take through? Flammables and ammunition and shampoos bigger than your pinkie. Do you remember when they started all those new security measures after 9/11 and we all freaked out? Remember how full the trash can used to be right by the metal detector, filled with everyone's banned items? Remember how irritated everyone used to be that they had to take off their shoes and belt and jacket? Those were the days when it really was the discombobulation area.

Nearly two decades later, and now most folks know before they go to the airport how they need to pack to limit their discombobulation. They know not to bother packing all that stuff, and to dress in a way that they can pretty quickly get through the checkpoints. **They know that the act of recombobulating on the other side is a heck of a lot easier if you get less discombobulated in the first place.**

Well, that is what Jesus is talking about in the rest of today's gospel, and in a whole bunch of verses that come right after. Every time he says, "You have heard it said...but I say to you..." he's talking about how to live in a way that keeps us from getting discombobulated.

You have heard it said don't murder, but I say to you don't even call people names and certainly don't hate.

You've heard it said don't commit adultery, but I say to you don't turn people into objects of selfish personal gratification.

You've heard it said don't swear falsely, but I say to you live with such honesty and integrity that everyone will know they can always take you at your word.

You've heard it said, an eye for an eye, but I say to you, tit for tat is no way to live, and besides, retaliating won't get you anything but more violence.

You've heard it said, love your neighbor, but I say, anybody can love their neighbor. So, try loving your enemy and then maybe something will change.

Think of these like Jesus' tips for not getting discombobulated to begin with. They are his rules for what to pack and also what not pack in our souls, so our lives don't grind to a halt when we hit the various checkpoints of life. Which is why I love how Eugene Peterson translates the end of Matthew 5 in *The Message*. Here's how Jesus ends this teaching:

“If all you do is love the lovable, do you expect a bonus? Anybody can do that. If you simply say hello to those who greet you, do you expect a medal? Any run-of-the-mill sinner does that. In a word, what I'm saying is, Grow up. You're kingdom subjects. Now live like it. Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you.”

My friends, there is so much good news in this gospel today. The good news is that, if you feel discombobulated, you're in luck. This is the Recombobulation Zone. This is the place where we can get ourselves back together. This is where we meet the grace of God in Word and Sacrament, in prayer and music and fellowship. There is peace here, peace to restore our souls and remind us that we are loved.

And there is also good news in the reminder that God wants us to be recombobulated when we go home, too. God longs for us to live in peace and forgiveness with everyone, including the ones we've struggled to like, let alone love. It's good news, because God will help us with the work it takes to be reconciled to them.

And finally, there is good news in the realization that we follow a Lord who can show us the way to not discombobulated to begin with. If we're willing to listen, and trust, and obey, we may just find that his way is hard, but it is also beautifully *better*, and it's actually it's a whole lot easier than the work of recombobulation.