Opinion
Spirituality




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St. Ignatius was on to something when we named his society "companions of Jesus."

As the commercialized phrase reads on plastic wristbands, "What Would Jesus Do?" (or "WWJD"), let us fall deeply into what that contemplation stirs in us. I like to ask the question, "What *did* Jesus Do?"

In the Gospel reading for this coming Sunday, Jesus begins his teaching by instructing those gathered to stop their murmuring. Similar to the murmuring of the Israelites during the Exodus, I wonder if the author is trying to draw our attention to how people's confusion and feelings of being lost leads them to be more concerned with the immediate distraction rather than God's enduring promise. True freedom comes with the cost of a journey from enslavement to trust.

This journey includes many invitations to trust masked as moments of uncertainty. We hold on to what we know and act out against the new moment offered to us.

The Jews were holding on to what they knew about Jesus. They knew he was Joseph's son. So, in that context, how dare he say he is more than his standing? The murmuring was judgement. They sized him up and they sized up the way he interpreted Scripture. This act of judging demonstrated at least two things: human control (we want to hold on to what we know) and human unwillingness to be led into a new definition of relationship.

Judgment leads to distrust.

It was the same with the Israelites. The murmuring in the desert demonstrated their impatience and lack of trust in Moses and Aaron. Grumbling helped pass the time and pass off the responsibility of their actions as real sacrifice.

I am no different. When I murmur, grumble or gossip it is because I am confused about people or a process and would rather hold on to my amazing ideas than concede to a different idea that others believe in. I notice I disengage when the gap between another's idea or interpretation and mine seems too wide.

But when I turn my heart towards Jesus, I can sense his invitation: "Stop murmuring among yourselves." Stop holding onto what you have known. Be open to other possibilities. Would you be able to recognize God's face if it were right here, right

now?

Social worker Brene Brown's Ted Talk went viral a few years ago. She shares her insights from 12 years of researching shame and vulnerability. In her book *Daring Greatly*, she defines vulnerability as "uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure." (34) She argues that vulnerability is not weakness. Vulnerability is really an experience of love.

She goes on to say, "to put our art, our writing, our photography, our ideas out into the world with no assurance of acceptance or appreciation — that's also vulnerability." I think of Jesus as he embodies this vulnerability, this love when he speaks to resistant Jews. I think of Moses and Aaron and their great faith in God and one another as they lead the Israelites to freedom. I think of Pope Francis as he scolds wrongdoing amid his leadership. I think of his way of proceeding that elevates love and tenderness and challenges what we have always known or done or believed.

I wonder how I can be more vulnerable in 2018. Can I stop my own murmuring about our current political climate and move towards people that can help me bridge the gap of belief and practice? Can I lean into love of neighbor when it comes to acts of violence, either interpersonally or through state-sanctioned policies, by standing up and supporting each person's dignity?

Better yet, can I truly companion Jesus as he speaks directly to others and challenges the way we all live together? This would require risk on my part … can I be courageous?

In the second reading for this coming Sunday, Paul, in the Letter to the Ephesians, reminds us that we can be loving and forgiving because Christ was first loving and forgiving:

> "All bitterness, fury, anger, shouting, and reviling
>
> must be removed from you, along with all malice.
>
> And be kind to one another, compassionate,
>
> forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ.

So be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love ... "

Dare I say I will live my life imitating God? As a child imitates their parent, maybe. As a friend imitates her or his best friend, even better.

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