

Chrism Mass Sermon
April 5, 2023
The Right Revered Craig W. Loya

I recently read Louise Erdrich's great novel *Love Medicine* which, as many of you know, tells the story of an extended Ojibwe family system across decades as they struggle to love one another while carrying generations of grief, loss, and joy in one grace-filled bundle.

One of the main characters is the matriarch Marie Kashpaw. In a chapter called "Resurrection," her adult son Gordie, who lost his wife in a mysterious death, is undone by grief. He goes on an epic drinking bender. When he comes home, she takes him in and cares for him as he detoxes over several days. He is a mess; she is a steady rock. When his withdrawal is at its violent peak, she locks him in a bedroom so he cannot hurt himself, and keeps watch all night outside the door. She recalls the intense pain of when he left her body at birth and says, "I told myself I'd kill him if he got away this time."

Through all the storms that rage around her, Marie stays rooted, and is a grounding force for others. She can do this because *she knows who she is*. She is Ojibwe, and she is a mother. Her power to love comes from the habits both identities have formed in her heart. It's that same power that draws me to love her.

In our reading from Ephesians today, I think Paul is inviting us to take a lesson from Marie. "We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine [. . .] But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ [. . .]" Marie's power to love and lead comes from being a grown up, rooted in exactly who she is. The same is true for us.

We may not be blown about by the kind of doctrinal winds that Paul was imagining, but we sure can chase something we think is shiny in the church. The last half-century has been a matter of chasing one thing after another to fix our decline. And what we enjoy even more is chasing small fights and controversies as

Chrism Mass Sermon
April 5, 2023
The Right Revered Craig W. Loya

a way of avoiding the harder work in front of us. All of us prefer some entertaining fight or gossip over the larger challenges that seem intractable.

Or, we're blown about by the constant barrage of people giving work to us, telling us the whole thing would be fixed if we would just do the thing they think we should do. When I was a rector, my assistant rector, who is a priest of this diocese whom some of you know, built what for me is the platonic form of a church website. It was awesome. At a vestry meeting not long after we launched it, I got an, "I went to my cousin's church last week, and their website has this fancy whistle on it, and so we have a lot of work to do on our website." You get the same kind of thing all the time. So easy to be blown about by those winds.

When we are chasing all the fixes, or scrambling to appease all the expectations, it's hard for us to be of much use to anyone. The first thing for any leader in the church, lay, deacon, priest, or bishop, is to grow up and know who you are.

So who are we, and what are we for?

Who we are is simple: we are God's beloved. We are formed by love and for love. Our value and our worth is just set. We didn't earn it and we can't lose it.

There are two kinds of people in the world: the Enough Love people and the Not Enough Love people. It's easy to tell the difference. The Enough Love people are generally cheerful and pleasant to be around. They are able to let small inconveniences and slights roll off and move on. They aren't trying to prove anything or compete with anyone. The Not Enough Love people are quick to be cranky. They are always anxiously striving to be right. They will nurse a grudge over the smallest perceived diss. There is never enough.

Right now, you are all thinking about the Not Enough Love people in your congregation or your family. I know, so am I. But the reality is all of us flip back

Chrism Mass Sermon
April 5, 2023
The Right Revered Craig W. Loya

and forth between both. I can preach this all day long, but when I am not saying my prayers, when I am not doing my own inner work, I know all the ways my heart makes lonely and greedy demands on the people I live and work with.

When we know who we are, Enough Love people, then we can truly be what we are for, which is, others. We are loved in order to be servants of God's people, servants of one another, servants of the broken and hurting world that is starving for love. We are not for building ourselves up, but for building each other up. Love is always about seeking good for someone else.

We don't have to play the silly game the disciples are playing in today's gospel about who is the best, who is the favorite, who is more worthy. We don't have to compete with each other because you can't be more or less loved than you already are.

Speaking to the clergy in his care, St. Augustine puts a finger right on our role: "With you I am a Christian. For you I am a bishop." That's certainly how I am striving to be. With you I am a disciple and a beggar. For you, I am a bishop. I'm only any good in that role if I am always for you, for your sake. In my first three years as bishop, I've learned a whole heap about what bishops cannot do or influence, but I've learned one thing I can do: Remind us who we are and what we are for. The same is true for you. We are ordained to be for the people to whom we are sent so that they can be for the world, with Jesus.

As we enter into the central mystery this week, Paul, one of our mothers Marie Kashpaw, and Jesus are all telling us: grow up. Let us no longer be children, blown around by all the stuff swirling around us, but remember who you are, and what you are for. Don't forget it.

We call Lord the one who was beaten, betrayed, cast off, and humiliated (and to think of the ego games we are always playing in the church!).

Chrism Mass Sermon
April 5, 2023
The Right Revered Craig W. Loya

And the one who suffered all those things did not meet the world's oppression with bitterness and vengeance and violence, but with perfect love. And that, it turns out, is the source of life. That, and that alone, conquers death.

So grow up. Remember who you are. Plant both feet on the ground of love, and let God's glorious healing power flood through you, pour out from you, to help set the whole world free. Amen.