

## This Simple Truth

Wayne Waibel – 04/28/2024

Every now and then you encounter a gospel lesson that simply does not resonate with you no matter how hard you try to let it. One of the truly marvelous things about Scripture is that its interpretation is something you allow - as opposed to something you intend.

It's like the action of love. You can easily let someone love you, but it is fruitless to try and make someone love you. I know, there are bound to be a number of old school managers that will take exception to the notion that you cannot make someone do anything, but rule by intimidation is no longer a viable means of supervision. It never really has been for those who live a life of love.

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When the church forgets that its mission is to show its attachment to Jesus, it becomes an institution that tries to accommodate to the world rather than transform it. And when the church becomes complicit in that endeavor – it ceases to be the body of Christ. Just about every obstacle that stands in the way of realizing the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven can be traced back to this simple truth.

But this is not an indictment of the American experience as it pertains to the flawed institutions that are self-perpetuating in this land of the free. I'd rather speak boldly about the courage behind that segment of our society that inhabits the home of the brave.

Much as Philip's exchange with the Ethiopian eunuch in today's Epistle lesson allows us to wonder how many of our accidental encounters with other people are really divine appointments. So, too, the "I am the vine" statement of Jesus in John fifteen serves to remind us that love is not a concept, known abstractly. It is an action, lived concretely.

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The fatal flaw in a lot of what passes for religion these days is that instead of practicing a faith that continually seeks understanding, they embrace an understanding that is seeking faithful followers. And they conveniently overlook the simple truth that proclamation of the Christian gospel does not require defamation of any other faith.

The good news thwarts the prejudices that religions and societies keep falling into. And I know that this community of faith gets that. I don't stand up here and espouse these truths because you need to learn them.

I do so because the world doles out copious amounts of largely inaccurate and quite often fake information. To deliver the truth once in a while is good practice for me. I figure if you get tired of hearing it – you'll let me know.

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It all begins with God's love. Love is a universal hunger in the human heart. The initiative of God's love makes possible the reality of human love. And that love is the touchstone around which the ultimate hope of humankind revolves.

Fresh from today's scripture lessons:

- "And everyone who loves is born of God and knows God."
- "If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us."
- "We love Him because He first loved us."
- "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this my Father is glorified."

That last text from the gospel of John can be confusing to the casual observer who thinks, “Well then – if I have Christ in my heart – then I believe I’ll just ask to have that great job, new home, and righteous Mustang convertible!” And there are pulpits out there that fill people with this balderdash.

The thing is – when the Spirit of the living God resides within you – your desires run along the lines of:

- Peace and goodwill toward your fellow brethren
- Radical generosity from those with plenty
- Illumination for those living in darkness

You know – things that matter.

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How about that – we ended up doing a deep dive into the gospel anyway. It just goes to show you that when you rely on the Holy Spirit as heavily as preachers do – you end up with some surprising results. Nothing gets in the way of a good sermon quicker than a bunch of words.

We are on a journey. In the life and work of the church many things change – baptisms, weddings, funerals. Families come and go. Preachers move on, too. Personally, I have no plans to leave, and no one’s asked me to – so you’re stuck for the time being.

The constant companion along our path is the Holy Spirit – that is the “in whom we live and move and have our being” component of a life of love in Jesus Christ. I use the term constant companion with reservation because I think crucial companion would be more appropriate, but that’s a personal bias, so...

We really are travelers. And we are so blessed in our journey. We are blessed to *know* the God of love is to *live* the love of God. And that is the simple truth of it. Amen.