

Yesterday's Sermon - In 10 Sentences or Less

Identity Check (Week 2) - Sovereign Love Outweighs Human Fallibility:



- 1) In the 2nd installment of our celebration of our Reformation and Presbyterian identity, we talked about how our branch of the Christian tree tends to appreciate or emphasize two unequal, oppositional forces more than others.
- 2) The 1st force is seen clearly in 1 John 4.7-21: because God has always been and always will be, then His love is the deepest, surest constant at any given point in both cosmic history and your own small life within it.
- 3) The Confession of 1967 (9.15) and Brief Statement of Faith (section 3) say that God exercises "sovereign love": it is His steady, tireless love that has the final say and that rules.
- 4) And that sovereign love isn't heavy-handed or authoritarian but is best expressed and seen in Jesus (again, The Confession of 1967, 9.15).
- 5) The 2nd oppositional force is articulated well in Ephesians 2.1-3: all human beings are caught up in a tangled web of evil that includes, but is far larger, than their mere individual lives, and which include things like unquestioned cultural biases and values.
- 6) So sin coaxes us into the illusion of being the masters of our own lives, but in the end it's how we lose the best of what it means to be human (see The Confession of 1967, 9.12).
- 7) The great Protestant reformer Martin Luther used a Latin phrase for how these two forces play out in our Christian lives, "Simul iustus et peccatore" (we are always justified and always a sinner, both being true at any given moment).
- 8) This is why it's normal to feel that you are both wounded and being healed, fragmented and being made whole, broken and being put back together simultaneously.
- 9) But these two forces - God's persistent love and the huge knot of human sinfulness - are not equal, and God has taken the onus upon Himself to redeem, mature, and complete us (Phil. 1.6).
- 10) Thus, a principle task in our own spiritual lives to remain attached to God's constant love, whether it's been a good or bad day, or whether we feel like we deserve that love or not, for if we make that divine love our center, we will be liberated from the fear of judgment (see 1 John 4.16-19).

Quotes Worth A 2nd Look

Richard Rohr, in *The World, The Flesh, and The Devil*:

"We've lost interest (in the topic of sin) because we usually hear it being used to judge, exclude, or control others, or to shame and control ourselves, but seldom to bring discernment or deeper understanding, much less compassion or forgiveness, to the human condition..."

If we are honest and perceptive, we surely see that actual evil often seems to dominate the very air, as St. Paul puts it in Eph. 2.2, and is more the norm than the exception. In fact, evil is often culturally agreed-upon, admired, and deemed necessary...before it becomes personal and shameful...We 'live according to the pattern of this world' because most cultures are based on false or superficial agreements about values, dignity, and success, and these illusion and deceits so totally control our conscious thought that most of us cannot see them, and thus they are never called into question."

C. S. Lewis:

"The Christian does not think God will love us because we are good, but that God will make us good because He loves us."

Anne Lamott:

"The secret is that God loves us exactly the way we are ... and that He loves us too much to let us stay like this."

More to Explore

1) Some scripture reading this week:

- On universal human sin, how we're all caught up in it, and the extent to which it takes away the power of choice -

[Eph 4.17-19 NRSV](#)

[Rom 3.9-20 NRSV](#)

- On the God who is love, from whom our love from each other flows -

[1 John 4.7-21 NRSV](#)

2) A beautiful piece of what we can learn about God's love from two spiritual giants - Thomas Merton and St. Teresa of Avila:

[Own Your Poverty: Thomas Merton on Understanding God's Love for You](#)

3) A prayer to use throughout the week:

Rev. Dr. Terri Pilarski (Christ Episcopal Church, Dearborn, MI)

"Holy God, before time You named us. Through time You redeem us and call us precious in Your sight. May we love as You love.

Through the stormy waters of life, let Your hands hold tightly to ours, for we are fragile and weak. May we love as You love.

Remove the deafness of our lives that keeps us from hearing and following the call of Your justice and mercy. May we love as You love.

Today and this week, remove our fears and distractions, so that we might feed both neighbors and strangers with Your grace.

So I ask once again, may we love as You love, amen."