

A Matter of Perspective Sermon: May 15, 2022

The one thing that I wrestle with every day, especially on Thursday night and Sunday morning when I have to say something, is how religion fits into our "real world." In fact, the essence of religion and spirituality is captured in the Gospel that was just read. Jesus is about ready to leave his disciples and he says, "I give you a new commandment --- that you love one another as I have loved you. And if you love one another as I have loved you, then people will know that you are my disciples." It can't get much simpler than that.

Yet, the world that we live in can be harsh, violent, and divided. So how does love make the world different or any better?

Look at what has happened in the last 24 hours. The slaughter at the super market in Buffalo. It's not just there. It's all over, and close to us. Downtown at the Bean in Chicago. There is violence and division in so many places. And, of course, we continue to pray for our brothers and sisters in Ukraine.

So, what difference in our world does this "new commandment" make?

As I was again watching the sunrise over La Grange Road, I realize it is the same sun rising over Ukraine. It is the same sun that will rise in Buffalo, New York. It's the same sun rising over a homeless person on Wacker Drive trying to stay warm.

I got away for a few days this past week ... lots of time to reflect. I realize that the Love Bucket, that crazy wooden bucket that has been sitting in the narthex for years ... yes, it is more than just a place to put money. When the Love Bucket gets inside your guts, it makes a difference in the way you look at the world. The moments and the people we so often take for granted ... when the "love bucket" is in your heart ... ordinary moments and people are laced with a deeper spirit. When the Love Bucket gets inside you guts, you realize Ukraine is not just another foreign country. Ukraine is a place where our brothers and sisters live. They are us and we are them. When you have the Love Bucket inside your guts, the gentleman in front of you in the checkout line who is trying to get enough change out of his pocket to pay for his groceries ... well, want to pay for his groceries and follow him home to make sure he is ok. When you're on vacation and you walk outside your room, and you see the person going in to clean it ... you look at him/her a bit differently, and you hope that person understands the dignity of the work he or she is doing. When you are at the mall, and you see a man in a wheelchair by himself in the hallway, and he drops something on the floor. When the Love Bucket is in your guts you go and pick it up for him. He says, "Thank you." Does he realize that those words become magic for your soul??

When the Love Bucket is in your guts ... ordinary moments and people become the places where we see God, and where God's spirit speaks to us.

Too often, my perspective is about me. But you and this church challenge me and all of us to look beyond ourselves. It's like when you walk into church on a Thursday night, and you wonder where the minister is. You find out he is not there. Really? He works one day per week and he can't show up on a Thursday night? You decide to stay. It's time for the sermon. A lady gets up from the front row. An ordinary person, an ordinary member. She talks about what the church means to her. She also talks about what it is like to pick up her disabled brother and bring him to church every Sunday. Sure ... her brother cannot speak ... but when he sits in church and folds his hands, he speaks louder than you or I could every speak. And then when it's time for communion, and you're sure there won't be communion since the minister is not there. But then two women come up to the altar ... they bless the bread and wine and share it with those

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gathered around the altar. You realize the church is filled with ordinary people, in ordinary moments, and in that ordinary-ness ... magic can happen. This kind of stuff happens when the Love Bucket get inside your guts.

On Friday we flew back from Florida. The flight gets delayed for two and a half hours. When we finally get back to Chicago, we have to sit on the tarmac for 45 minutes. We get into the terminal and go downstairs to find our luggage. The luggage carousel is broken. It is now 11:30pm, and we were supposed to back about 7:00pm. Peggy goes to get the car, as Q and I wait for our suitcases to appear. There is a lady standing next to me and she comments, "This has been a really, really long wait." I reply, "Yes, it has been a long wait. But you know who has a longer wait? The families in Ukraine waiting to get on a bus to safety. That's a long wait. This is an inconvenience." She replies, "Yes. I guess life is just a matter of perspective."

For years and years, many people have been waiting for Jesus to come back. But when the Love Bucket gets inside your guts, and you share an ordinary act of kindness to somebody you don't even know ... we discover anew --- Jesus is already back!! Yes ... true religion and spirituality ----- It's a matter of perspective!!

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