
Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

Palm Sunday, March 29, 2015

Authentic Faith

“And to love God with all of the heart, a full understanding, and all of one’s strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself is much more important than all kinds of entirely burned offerings and sacrifices.”

Mark 12:33 (Common English Bible)

Burned offerings and sacrifices are not really a concern in the present-day church, at least not literally. Figuratively speaking, they are still very present. Today they simply look different. Perhaps you have noticed them on Sunday mornings during church. They show-up in a wide variety of disguises, the critical finger pointed at another’s unwise clothing decision for coming to church, the haughty condemnation of another understanding of scripture, the boasting – subtle and less subtle – of service given to the ministry of the church. Each is an announcement that “my faith is better than your faith.”

Jesus wasn’t pleased with the burned offerings and sacrifices in His day; Jesus isn’t pleased with them today. Perhaps it is because they are so powerful at drawing attention to the individual making the offering or sacrifice. And attention that is directed to the individual is attention not directed to Jesus.

It would be a mistake to conclude that our Lord simply isn’t interested in sharing the stage with anyone else. No, what Jesus is up to is protecting each of us from conceit. Any grand and expansive gesture of sacrifice – or announcement of the stumbling of another – builds love for self while diminishing love for others. It is then that any practice of faith becomes a contest of whose journey is the better. Eventually, the whole notion of adoration of Jesus as Lord is replaced with the adoration of self. It becomes a faith that bears little resemblance to the Christian faith.

Jesus shows the way, in this one sentence, of authentic faith; a faith that honors God and glorifies Jesus. It is a faith that directs love to God and neighbor. It is a faith that cares deeply about something beyond the self. Loving God with all of one’s heart, mind and strength and to love the neighbor just as ardently as we love ourselves demands considerable energy. Such love depletes resources that might be used for judgment of others and the aggrandizement of self. It is then that our faith ventures into the deeper places with Christ. It is then that faith realizes maturity.

Prayer: Protect my heart, O God, from conceit. Replace judgment with love and graciousness. Use me as an instrument of Your peace that Christ may be glorified in my thoughts and behavior. Amen.

Doug Hood