

"THE JESUS CREED"

LET'S BEGIN THIS MORNING WITH A QUIZ.

"WHICH OF THESE PHRASES IS A COMMON WAY OF SAYING, 'I CAN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE.'"

- "THAT'S THE LAST STICK."
- "THAT'S THE LAST LEAF."
- "THAT'S THE LAST STRAW."
- "I'M MOVING TO CANADA."

NOW IF YOU THINK THAT SOUNDS LIKE A QUESTION YOU MIGHT HEAR ON "WHO WANTS TO BE A MILLIONAIRE?," YOU'RE RIGHT.

IN FACT, THAT EXACT QUESTION WAS ON THE SHOW.

IT WAS A HUNDRED DOLLAR QUESTION – THE FIRST ONE – THE EASY ONE – THE "GIMME" QUESTION.

THE ANSWER, OF COURSE - THE COMMON WAY OF SAYING "*I CAN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE,*" IS "*THAT'S THE LAST STRAW!*"

ON THE SHOW, WHEN THAT QUESTION WAS ASKED, AN ATTORNEY (SORRY BARBARA, FRED & MAX) FROM OREGON MISSED IT!

SOMETIMES THE THINGS THAT SEEM THE EASIEST BECOME HARD FOR US.

AS MANY OF YOU KNOW, I PLAYED HOCKEY AS A YOUTH.

I WAS A GOALIE.

I DON'T REMEMBER A LOT OF PARTICULAR GAMES OR SPECIFIC MOMENTS IN THOSE GAMES BUT THERE'S ONE THAT *DOES* STAND OUT FOR ME.

I REMEMBER THE ENTIRE GAME BECAUSE OF ONE MOMENT.

IT WAS A GAME WHERE I FELT LIKE I WAS REALLY IN "THE ZONE."

EVERY SHOT SEEMED LIKE IT WAS JUST FLOATING AT ME LIKE A BALLOON.

THE PUCK LOOKED AS BIG AS A BASKETBALL.

BUT AT ONE POINT MY TEAM WAS IN THE OFFENSIVE ZONE AT THE OTHER END OF THE ICE.

ONE OF THE OPPOSING PLAYERS CLEARED THE PUCK, BANKING IT OFF THE BOARDS ABOUT 150 FEET AWAY FROM ME.

THE PUCK SLOWLY CAME TOWARD ME IN THE NET, MOVING ABOUT AS QUICKLY AS A CATERPILLAR ACROSS A SIDEWALK.

I PUT MY STICK DOWN & WAITED FOR IT & WATCHED IT SLIDE RIGHT PAST MY STICK & INTO THE NET.

LIKE I SAID, I DON'T REMEMBER MANY GAMES OR MANY MOMENTS IN THOSE GAMES I PLAYED AS A YOUTH.

I DON'T REMEMBER MANY OF THE SAVES I MADE – BUT ONE I *DIDN'T* MAKE IS EMBLAZONED IN MY MEMORY.

YOU CAN'T VERY EASILY DIG A HOLE IN AN ICE RINK BUT IF I COULD HAVE I WOULD HAVE!
SOMETIMES THINGS ARE SO EASY, THEY BECOME HARD.

I FOUND THAT TO BE TRUE THIS WEEK AS I LOOKED AT THIS PASSAGE.

WHEN I FIRST CONSIDERED IT, I KNEW THIS WOULD BE AN EASY WEEK OF SERMON PREPARATION.

THERE WERE SO MANY DIRECTIONS TO TAKE – SO MANY GREAT POSSIBILITIES WITH THIS PASSAGE.

FIRST OF ALL, THIS VERY DAY IS ALL SAINTS' DAY.

THERE'S A LOT THAT CAN BE DONE WITH THAT.

THERE'S A LOT THAT CAN BE SAID ABOUT THE FACT THAT WE ARE ALL – AS FOLLOWERS OF JESUS CHRIST – SAINTS.

A SAINT ISN'T SOMEONE WHO HAS DONE EXTRAORDINARY DEEDS.

IT'S NOT A ROLE CONFINE TO A FEW EXCEPTIONAL & SEEMINGLY PERFECT INDIVIDUALS.

WHEN PAUL TALKS ABOUT THE "SAINTS," HE'S TALKING ABOUT ALL THOSE WHO ARE WITHIN THE HOUSEHOLD OF FAITH.

HE MEANS EVERYONE IS A SAINT WHO HAS MADE A COMMITMENT TO FOLLOWING JESUS.

YES, IT WOULD BE EASY TO FOCUS ON ALL SAINTS' DAY TODAY.

BUT IT'S ALSO THE SUNDAY BEFORE COMMITMENT SUNDAY & A GOOD TIME TO FOCUS ON OUR COMMITMENT TO CHRIST & HIS CHURCH.

IT'S A GOOD TIME TO THINK ABOUT THE WAY IN WHICH WE ARE CALLED TO PARTICIPATE – THROUGH OUR GIVING – IN EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS HERE.

WE BECOME PARTNERS WITH ONE ANOTHER IN SUPPORTING THE WORK OF THE CHURCH BY DOING OUR FAIR SHARE – OUR FAIR SHARE OF FINANCIAL GIVING & OUR FAIR SHARE IN THE GIVING OF OUR TIME, OUR TALENTS & OUR ENERGY.

THIS PASSAGE TELLS US THAT GOD EXPECTS EVERY PART OF YOU.

GOD EXPECTS YOU TO COMMIT YOUR HEART, YOUR SOUL, YOUR MIND & YOUR STRENGTH TO SERVING YOUR CREATOR.

SO, YES, THIS PASSAGE EASILY FITS INTO A STEWARDSHIP OF LIFE EMPHASIS TODAY.

AND THEN THERE'S THE FACT THAT THIS IS THE VERY PASSAGE ON WHICH OUR CHURCH MISSION STATEMENT IS ENTIRELY BASED – "HEADS, HEARTS & HANDS FOR CHRIST IN SERVICE & CELEBRATION."

10 YEARS AGO, WHEN WE FIRST BECAME A NEW CHURCH, THIS IS WHAT WE DETERMINED GOD WAS CALLING US TO BE – A PEOPLE WHO HAVE COMMITTED EVERYTHING – ALL THAT WE HAVE & ALL THAT WE ARE IN SERVICE TO GOD & IN CELEBRATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP WE HAVE WITH GOD, THE RELATIONSHIPS WE SHARE WITH ONE ANOTHER & THE RELATIONSHIPS WE CAN FOSTER WITH THOSE OUTSIDE OF THIS CHURCH FAMILY.

SO PREPARATION FOR THIS SERMON SHOULD HAVE BEEN AS EASY AS IT COULD POSSIBLY BE. AND THEREIN LIES THE PROBLEM.

IT WAS TOO EASY.

I FOUND THAT ANY ONE OF THOSE DIRECTIONS WOULD HAVE BEEN A GOOD ONE TO TAKE, BUT TO TRY TO COMBINE THEM WOULD SIMPLY CREATE A HODGE-PODGE & UNDERMINE THE IMPORTANCE OF EACH ONE.

SO I'VE DECIDED TO ABANDON AN EMPHASIS ON THOSE THREE THEMES & JUST FOCUS ON THE PASSAGE ITSELF.

HERE IN THIS PASSAGE WE FIND THE MOST POSITIVE ENCOUNTER WITH A SO-CALLED ADVERSARY IN THE ENTIRE GOSPEL.

THIS MAN ISN'T TRYING TO TRAP JESUS.

HE'S NOT TRYING TO TRICK HIM INTO SAYING SOMETHING THAT WILL LAND HIM INTO TROUBLE WITH THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS.

HE HAS LISTENED TO JESUS & HE REALIZES THAT JESUS IS SPEAKING PROFOUND TRUTHS & ASKS HIM A GENUINE & SINCERE QUESTION.

HE WANTS JESUS TO TELL WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT IN BEING A PERSON OF FAITH.

YOU SEE, THERE WERE 613 PRECEPTS IN JEWISH LAW.

613! YOU WERE EXPECTED TO KNOW THEM ALL & OBEY EVERY ONE OF THEM.

248 OF THOSE LAWS WERE POSITIVE & 365 WERE NEGATIVE.

IN OTHER WORDS, THERE WERE A LOT OF "THOU SHALTS" BY WHICH PEOPLE WERE EXPECTED TO LIVE & AN EVEN GREATER NUMBER OF "THOU SHALT NOTS."

THIS MAN WANTED JESUS TO CUT THROUGH IT ALL & TELL HIM WHAT WAS MOST IMPORTANT IN THE LAW.

JESUS STARTS BY GIVING HIM A RELATIVELY SAFE RESPONSE.

HE GIVES HIM THE SHEMA FROM DEUTERONOMY: *“HEAR, O ISRAEL: THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE; YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND & WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.”*

THIS MIGHT HAVE BEEN EXPECTED.

THIS WAS, AFTER ALL, THE FIRST PRAYER THAT JEWISH CHILDREN ARE TAUGHT TO SAY.

THE SHEMA (WHICH MEANS “LISTEN” – THE FIRST WORD OF THE PASSAGE) HAS BEEN CALLED *“THE QUINTESSENTIAL EXPRESSION OF THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL BELIEF & COMMITMENT OF JUDAISM.”*

SO FAR, SO GOOD.

EVERYONE AROUND JESUS NODS IN AGREEMENT – *“SURE, THAT MAKES SENSE. WE SAY THOSE WORDS EVERY MORNING WHEN WE RISE & EVERY NIGHT WHEN WE RETIRE. WE KNOW THOSE WORDS EXACTLY AS HE HAS STATED THEM.”*

AH, BUT JESUS ISN'T FINISHED.

HE SAYS, *“THE SECOND IS THIS: ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ THERE IS NO OTHER COMMANDMENT GREATER THAN THESE.”*

WHAT HE HAS DONE IS TAKEN THIS SECOND ONE THAT HE ADDS – A VERSE FROM LEVITICUS & ELEVATES IT TO THE VERY STATUS OF THE SHEMA!

SCOT McKNIGHT HAS WRITTEN AN ENTIRE BOOK & COURSE ENTITLED “THE JESUS CREED” WHICH IS WHAT HE HAS LABELLED THIS PASSAGE.

HE SAYS, *“...WHEN JESUS AMENDED THE SHEMA, WE NEED TO TAKE NOTE. TO BE SURE, JESUS ACCEPTED THE SHEMA, BUT HE ALSO ADDED TO IT.*

THE QUESTION WE THEN ASK IS THIS: IS JESUS SUGGESTING ONLY A SUBTLE AMENDMENT? NO. IT TAKES REAL PLUCK (OR CHUTZPAH) TO ADD TO THE SACRED SHEMA, BUT THIS ADDITION REVEALS THE HEART OF THE JESUS CREED.”

McKNIGHT THEN GOES ON TO SAY, *“MOST OF YOU KNOW THE APOSTLES’ CREED AND WILL KNOW IF I WERE TO ADD A FEW LINES AFTER ‘LIFE EVERLASTING’ – SUCH AS, ‘AND IN SUPPORTING YOUR LOCAL CHURCH BY GIVING A TITHE OF INCOME, BEFORE TAXES!’*

EVEN IN A CIVILIZED CHURCH, IF I WERE TO DO THAT, I’D GET SUCKER-PUNCHED!

‘YOU DON’T MESS WITH CREEDS, SUGAR,’ THE ATTENDANT WOULD SAY TO ME IN THE AMBULANCE AS SHE CARTED ME AWAY.”

BUT THAT’S PRECISELY WHAT JESUS DOES.

HE NARROWS THE ENTIRE LAW DOWN TO JUST THE SHEMA, BUT THEN HE ADDS A NEW TWIST TO IT.

“LOVING GOD & LOVING OTHERS.”

THIS IS THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL.

NOTICE THAT JESUS DOESN'T JUST SAY, "LOVE THE LORD WITH YOUR HEART, SOUL, MIND & STRENGTH."

HE SAYS, *ALL YOUR HEART, ALL YOUR SOUL, ALL YOUR MIND AND ALL YOUR STRENGTH.*

THIS IS SIGNIFICANT.

GOD DOESN'T EXPECT A PIECE OF YOU.

GOD DOESN'T ASK FOR THE LEFTOVER TIME, THE LEFTOVER COMMITMENT, THE LEFTOVER DEVOTION, THE LEFTOVER MONEY.

HE WANTS ALL OF YOU – 'YOUR HEAD, YOUR HEART & YOUR HANDS IN SERVICE & CELEBRATION.'

I LOVE THE WAY EUGENE PETERSON HAS TRANSLATED THIS IN THE MESSAGE.

HE SAYS, "...*LOVE THE LORD GOD WITH ALL YOUR PASSION & PRAYER & INTELLIGENCE & ENERGY.*"

I THINK WE HAVE A TENDENCY TO FOCUS ON THE SECOND PART OF THE ANSWER JESUS GIVES TO THIS MAN – THE "*LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF*" PART.

WE THINK OF THAT AS BEING THE MOST REVOLUTIONARY ASPECT OF WHAT JESUS SAYS HERE.

AT THE TIME, I THINK THAT WAS TRUE.

BUT, INTERESTINGLY, I DON'T THINK THAT'S TRUE IN OUR DAY.

I THINK WE'VE MADE SOME GREAT STRIDES IN UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF THAT PART OF *THE JESUS CREED*.

WHILE THE "LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF" ADDITION WOULD HAVE RAISED EYEBROWS & MADE PEOPLE UNCOMFORTABLE IN JESUS' DAY, I THINK THERE'S ANOTHER PART OF THIS CREED THAT DOES THAT WITH US TODAY.

IT'S THE VERY FIRST PART – THE PART THAT SAYS, "*THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE.*"

THAT'S THE PART, I BELIEVE, THAT IS MORE OF A STUMBLING BLOCK TO OUR GENERATION THAN THE REST OF THE CREED.

WHAT JESUS IS SAYING – WHAT THE SHEMA IS SAYING -IS THAT THERE IS ONE GOD.

THIS ONE GOD IS THE GOD REVEALED IN THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL.

IT IS THE GOD OF ABRAHAM & SARA, THE GOD OF REBECCA & ISAAC, THE GOD OF JACOB & RACHEL, THE GOD OF MOSES, THE GOD OF THE EXODUS, THE GOD OF DAVID, THE GOD OF ISAIAH & AMOS, THE GOD OF RUTH & ESTHER, THE GOD OF MARY & JOSEPH.

JESUS ISN'T OFFERING A CREED TO A GOD WE ADDRESS AS "*TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN.*"

IN OUR DAY & AGE AND IN OUR PLURALISTIC SOCIETY, THIS – TO ME – IS THE GREATEST THREAT WE FACE IN OUR FAITH.

WE ARE A PEOPLE WHO ARE COMMITTED TO WHAT HAS BEEN LABELLED “RADICAL MONOTHEISM” AND THAT CAN BE A DANGEROUS THING.

WE HAVE TO BE CAREFUL THAT WE DON’T LET THAT BELIEF & UNDERSTANDING DETERIORATE INTO ARROGANCE, CYNICISM, DISRESPECT & VIOLENCE.

WHENEVER WE FIND OURSELVES SINKING INTO THAT KIND OF ATTITUDE TOWARD OTHERS, WE NEED TO REMEMBER THE WORDS OF ISAIAH: “*MY THOUGHTS ARE NOT YOUR THOUGHTS, AND MY WAYS ARE NOT YOUR WAYS.*”

GOD IS FREE & SOVEREIGN.

WE DON’T OWN GOD & WE DON’T CONTROL GOD.

NEVERTHELESS, THE FACT REMAINS THAT OUR GOD IS NOT ONE GOD AMONG MANY & FOLLOWING THE JESUS CREED IS A COMPLETE REJECTION OF OUR MODERN-DAY MANTRA OF “ALL ROADS LEAD TO HEAVEN.”

WHEN JESUS WAS ASKED TO NARROW DOWN THE ENTIRE FAITH TO ONE SIMPLE UNDERSTANDING, HE BEGAN BY SAYING “*THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE.*”

THE JESUS CREED IS A GOOD PASSAGE FOR TODAY.

IT’S A GOOD PASSAGE TO REMIND US THAT WE ARE ALL SAINTS AS FOLLOWERS OF JESUS CHRIST.

IT’S A GOOD PASSAGE FOR STEWARDSHIP OF LIFE – REMINDING US THAT GOD ASKS FOR ALL THAT WE HAVE & ALL THAT WE ARE.

IT’S A GOOD PASSAGE TO REMIND US OF WHO WE ARE AS PART OF THIS PARTICULAR FAMILY OF FAITH –WE ARE THOSE WHO COMMIT HEAD, HEART & HANDS FOR CHRIST IN SERVICE & CELEBRATION.

AMEN.

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