

I John 4:7-21  
May 10, '09

"SEEING GOD"

AS I BEGIN SERMON PREPARATION, I WILL FREQUENTLY LOOK BACK TO SEE IF I HAVE PREACHED A SERMON ON A PARTICULAR PASSAGE.

WITH SOME PASSAGES, OBVIOUSLY, THERE WILL BE A NUMBER OF SERMONS OVER THE YEARS. WHEN I DETERMINED THAT I WOULD USE THESE VERSES FROM I JOHN FOR TODAY'S SERMON, I KNEW THERE WAS A HIGH LIKELIHOOD THAT I HAD USED THIS PASSAGE BEFORE.

I DIDN'T INITIALLY LOOK FOR THE SERMON – OR SERMONS – AS THE CASE MAY BE. BUT AS I CONSIDERED THE DIRECTION THE SERMON MIGHT TAKE & AS I SETTLED ON A TITLE, AND THEN AS I BEGAN THE ACTUAL SERMON PREPARATION, IT SEEMED EERILY FAMILIAR.

I WENT BACK THROUGH MY SERMON ARCHIVES TO SEE IF I COULD DISCOVER WHAT IT WAS THAT FELT SO MEMORABLE.

WHAT I FOUND WAS THAT I HAD USED THIS PASSAGE IN A SERMON IN 2006. NOW THAT DIDN'T SURPRISE ME.

BUT THEN, WHEN I LOOKED AT THE DATE, I WAS A BIT TAKEN BACK. IT WAS THE SECOND SUNDAY IN MAY – MOTHER'S DAY. NOW THAT SEEMED A BIT ODD & MORE THAN A COINCIDENCE.

BUT WHAT REALLY STARTLED ME WAS WHEN I LOOKED AT THE TITLE OF THAT SERMON ON MOTHER'S DAY, 2006 BASED ON I JOHN 4:7-21 – "SEEING GOD."

NOW I MUST TELL YOU THE THOUGHT RAN THROUGH MY MIND – *"IF I DON'T REMEMBER PREACHING THE SAME PASSAGE ON THE SAME SUNDAY WITH THE SAME TITLE, WHO ELSE IS GOING TO REMEMBER IT?! WHY NOT JUST PREACH IT AGAIN? MAYBE IT DIDN'T TAKE THE FIRST TIME BECAUSE OBVIOUSLY IT DIDN'T WITH ME."*

IN NEARLY 17 YEARS HERE, THOUGH, I'VE NOT DONE THAT YET, AND I'M NOT ABOUT TO START NOW.

BESIDES, IT'S JUST TOO MUCH FUN LOOKING AT A PASSAGE OF SCRIPTURE & SEEING WHERE GOD LEADS YOU WITH THAT PASSAGE.

IT'S OBVIOUS, THOUGH, THAT THESE VERSES HAVE STRUCK ME A COUPLE TIMES AS APPROPRIATE FOR A MOTHER'S DAY MESSAGE.

IT'S ALSO OBVIOUS FROM THIS TITLE THAT I'VE CHOSEN ON TWO OCCASIONS, THAT WHEN I THINK OF THE BEST PLACE TO LOOK TO SEE GOD, IT'S TO MOTHERS.

THAT IS SO OFTEN SO VERY TRUE.

IF YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT GOD LOOKS LIKE – IF YOU WANT TO SEE GOD IN THE WORLD TODAY - YOU NEED LOOK NO FURTHER THAN THE LOVE OF A MOTHER FOR HER CHILDREN.

IN A CALVIN & HOBBS COMIC STRIP FOR MOTHER'S DAY, CALVIN IS PICTURED STANDING BY HIS MOTHER'S BED.

*"HEY, MOM! WAKE UP. I MADE YOU A MOTHER'S DAY CARD."*

*"MY, HOW SWEET OF YOU." SHE SAYS.*

*"I DID IT ALL BY MYSELF. GO AHEAD & READ IT."*

*SHE BEGINS TO READ THE CARD: "I WAS GOING TO BUY A CARD WITH HEARTS OF PINK & RED. BUT THEN I THOUGHT I'D RATHER SPEND THE MONEY ON ME INSTEAD.*

*IT'S AWFULLY HARD TO BUY THINGS WHEN ONE'S ALLOWANCE IS SO SMALL.*

*SO I GUESS YOU'RE PRETTY LUCKY I GOT YOU ANYTHING AT ALL.*

*HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY. THERE, I'VE SAID IT. NOW I'M DONE.*

*SO HOW ABOUT GETTING OUT OF BED & FIXING BREAKFAST FOR YOUR SON."*

*SIGNED, "CALVIN."*

*"I'M DEEPLY MOVED," SAID HIS MOTHER.*

*"DID YOU NOTICE THE PART ABOUT MY ALLOWANCE?" HE ASKS.*

WELL, SOME OF YOU MAY FEEL LIKE CALVIN'S MOTHER THIS MORNING, WONDERING IF ANYBODY'S GOING TO SAY, *"THANK YOU, MOM, FOR ALL THE GOOD STUFF YOU DO."*

BEING A MOTHER IS A TOUGH JOB & THE GREATEST PICTURE OF GOD THAT WE HAVE IN ALL THE WORLD.

WE RECOGNIZE & HONOR THAT TODAY.

THESE VERSES FROM I JOHN ARE AMONG MY VERY FAVORITE VERSES IN THE ENTIRE BIBLE.

THESE ARE FAMILIAR WORDS BECAUSE THEY GO STRAIGHT TO THE HEART OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A FOLLOWER OF JESUS CHRIST.

IT IS HERE IN THIS PASSAGE THAT WE FIND WHAT IS PROBABLY THE GREATEST STATEMENT ABOUT GOD IN THE ENTIRE BIBLE, THE STATEMENT THAT *"GOD IS LOVE."*

ALAN CULPEPPER, IN HIS COMMENTARY ON FIRST JOHN SAYS, *"THERE IS NO MORE SIMPLE, SUFFICIENT OR PROFOUND STATEMENT IN THE WHOLE BIBLE THAN 'GOD IS LOVE.'"*

THE VERY FIRST STATEMENT THAT THE YOUNGEST CHILDREN IN OUR MEMORY WORK CONTEST LEARN IS *"GOD IS LOVE."*

I REMEMBER THE FIRST SERMON I EVER PREACHED.

IT WAS PREACHED TO A DARK AND EMPTY SANCTUARY.

WHEN I WAS GROWING UP, MY MOTHER WAS A SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHER & THEY HAD TEACHER'S MEETINGS ON THE SECOND & FOURTH TUESDAY OF EVERY MONTH.

I WOULD GO WITH HER AND, QUITE OFTEN, DURING THE MEETING, I'D WANDER INTO THE SANCTUARY & SOMETIMES STAND IN THE PULPIT.

THE ONLY THING I REMEMBER SAYING WAS MY FAVORITE BIBLE VERSE AT THE TIME.

THAT VERSE WOULD CONSTITUTE THE ENTIRE SERMON THAT I WOULD DELIVER TO THAT DARK & EMPTY SANCTUARY.

*“GOD IS LOVE.”*

AND SOMEONE OUT THERE, OF COURSE, IS SAYING, *“I WISH HE WAS STILL THAT BRIEF!”*

THIS PAST WEEK I IMMERSSED MYSELF IN THIS PASSAGE.

I READ IT OVER & OVER.

THAT MAY SEEM ODD BECAUSE IT IS SO FAMILIAR & ALSO BECAUSE IT IS STILL ONE OF MY FAVORITE PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE.

YOU’D THINK I’D KNOW IT WELL ENOUGH NOT TO *HAVE* TO READ IT OVER & OVER AGAIN.

THAT IS PRECISELY WHY I *DID*.

ONE CAN BECOME SO FAMILIAR WITH A PASSAGE OF THE BIBLE THAT YOU THINK YOU KNOW WHAT IT SAYS WITHOUT REALLY READING IT – WITHOUT ALLOWING IT TO TRULY SINK INTO YOUR SOUL – WITHOUT ALLOWING THE HOLY SPIRIT TO SPEAK TO YOU IN A NEW WAY WITH OLD WORDS.

WHAT I DISCOVERED WAS A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE ON LOVE.

I THINK WE TEND TO MAKE LOVE OUT TO BE SOMETHING THAT’S SWEET, SOFT, SENTIMENTAL & SYRUPY.

IF YOU WERE TO ATTACH A COLOR TO LOVE IT WOULD BE PINK.

IF YOU WANTED IT TO HAVE A TEXTURE, IT WOULD BE SOFT.

IF IT HAS A VOLUME, IT’S LOW & A BEAT, IT’S SLOW.

WE HAVE A PICTURE OF LOVE & I WOULD SUGGEST TO YOU THAT THAT PICTURE IS SHATTERED BY JOHN WITH THESE WORDS.

LOVE CAN BE AS DARK AS THE DARK NIGHT OF YOUR SOUL.

IT CAN BE AS HARD AS THE NAILS THAT WERE DRIVEN INTO THE HANDS & FEET OF JESUS ON GOLGOTHA.

IT CAN BE AS SHARP AS THE SWORD THAT PIERCED HIS SIDE.

IT CAN BE AS LOUD & AS FAST AS THE MUSIC BLARING IN THE CAR NEXT TO YOU AT THE STOP LIGHT.

LOVE ISN’T THE WEAK, NAMBY-PAMBY THING WE’VE MADE IT OUT TO BE.

LOVE IS STRONG & POTENT & POWERFUL.

THAT’S WHAT JOHN IS SAYING IN THIS PASSAGE.

HE SAYS, *“IN THIS IS LOVE, NOT THAT WE LOVED GOD BUT THAT HE LOVED US AND SENT HIS SON TO BE THE ATONING SACRIFICE FOR OUR SINS. BELOVED, SINCE GOD LOVED US SO MUCH, WE ALSO OUGHT TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER.”*

THAT KIND OF LOVE – LOVE THAT SACRIFICES ALL – ISN’T WEAK & NAMBY-PAMBY.

THAT’S THE KIND OF LOVE JOHN IS CHALLENGING US TO OFFER TO OTHERS WITH THESE WORDS.

IT'S A LOVE THAT KNOWS NO BOUNDS – A LOVE THAT DOESN'T TAKE THE EASY WAY OUT – A LOVE THAT STOPS AT NOTHING.

LATER, HE SAYS, *"LOVE HAS BEEN PERFECTED AMONG US IN THIS: THAT WE MAY HAVE BOLDNESS ON THE DAY OF JUDGMENT, BECAUSE AS HE IS, SO ARE WE IN THIS WORLD."*

DID YOU CATCH THAT WORD "BOLDNESS?"

YOU SEE, BOLDNESS DOESN'T FIT THE STEREOTYPICAL IMAGE OF LOVE.

BUT THAT'S WHAT JOHN IS TRYING TO TEACH US ABOUT LOVE.

IT'S STRONG, POTENT, POWERFUL – AND BOLD.

AND THEN HE FOLLOWS THAT UP IMMEDIATELY BY SAYING, *"THERE IS NO FEAR IN LOVE, BUT PERFECT LOVE CASTS OUT FEAR; FOR FEAR HAS TO DO WITH PUNISHMENT, AND WHOEVER FEARS HAS NOT REACHED PERFECTION IN LOVE."*

LOVE IS FEARLESS.

A CHAPLAIN IN A PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL WAS PREACHING ON THIS TEXT AND BOLDLY ANNOUNCED, *"I JOHN 4:18 SAYS 'THERE IS NO FEAR IN LOVE, BUT PERFECT LOVE CASTS OUT ALL FEAR.'"*

IMMEDIATELY A MAN IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CROWD JUMPED UP AND YELLED, *"THAT'S A BUNCH OF BALONEY!"*

FEARFUL PEOPLE JUST DON'T GET IT.

THE MORE FILLED WITH FEAR ONE IS, THE MORE DIFFICULT IT IS TO RELAX INTO GOD'S LOVING ARMS.

A JESUIT PRIEST, THE LATE FATHER TONY DE MELLO, CLAIMED THAT THERE ARE ULTIMATELY ONLY TWO THINGS IN THE WORLD: GOD, WHO JOHN TELLS US, IS LOVE; AND FEAR, WHICH HAS MANY DREADFUL NAMES LIKE SATAN.

THERE'S NO EVIL IN THE WORLD THAT YOU CAN'T TRACE TO FEAR.

NOT ONE.

ALL OF THESE DESCRIPTIONS FROM JOHN ARE A FAR CRY FROM OUR TRADITIONAL IMAGE OF LOVE, AREN'T THEY?

IT IS SACRIFICIAL TO THE ULTIMATE EXTENT.

IT IS BOLD.

IT IS FEARLESS.

IN THESE WORDS, JOHN TELLS US CLEARLY THAT IF WE WANT TO SEE GOD, IT WILL BE THROUGH LOVE – THE LOVE WE OFFER OTHERS & THE LOVE WE SEE IN OTHERS.

IT IS SACRIFICIAL, IT IS BOLD, IT IS FEARLESS.

LIVE YOUR LIFE IN LOVE & YOU WILL SEE GOD.

NOW IT SEEMS RATHER ODD TO HAVE BEGUN WHAT APPEARED TO BE A MOTHER'S DAY MESSAGE WITH WARM, GENTLE THOUGHTS OF LOVE, ONLY TO HAVE THOSE THOUGHTS DETOURED BY A SEEMINGLY CONTRADICTORY UNDERSTANDING OF THIS GREATEST OF ALL CHRISTIAN VIRTUES.

AH, THERE'S THE RUB.

WE DON'T HAVE TO SACRIFICE ONE SET OF IMAGES FOR THE OTHER.

IN FACT, TO FULLY CAPTURE THE ENTIRE SCOPE OF GOD'S LOVE, WE MUST CLING TO BOTH.

THAT IS PRECISELY WHAT BRINGS US FULL CIRCLE – BACK TO MOTHER'S DAY.

YOU CAN HANG ONTO THE PINK COLOR, THE SOFT TEXTURE, THE LOW VOLUME & THE SLOW BEAT.

THAT MAY BE AN ACCURATE DEPICTION OF MOTHERHOOD.

IT'S ACCURATE – BUT INCOMPLETE.

MOTHERHOOD IS ALSO THE OTHER SIDE OF LOVE – IT IS SACRIFICIAL, BOLD & FEARLESS.

AND NOW, STEALING AT LEAST ONE LINE FROM THAT SERMON THREE YEARS AGO OF THE SAME TITLE:

*“LOOK AROUND YOU – ESPECIALLY AT MOTHERS – FOR THERE, MORE THAN ANYWHERE ELSE – IS THE LIVING, LOVING GOD IN YOUR VERY MIDST.” AMEN.*

*The Reverend Dr. Dennis R. Davenport  
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