

Luke 11:1-13
August 1, '10

“SECULAR THEOLOGY – PART 2”

IF YOU BELIEVE THE VERACITY OF THOSE WHO SIGN OUR ATTENDANCE BOOKS EVERY WEEK, WE’VE HAD SOME INTERESTING GUESTS HERE AT EASTMINSTER OVER THE YEARS.

IT MAY SURPRISE YOU TO KNOW THAT JOHNNY DEPP HAS WORSHIPPED WITH US AS HAS TOM CRUISE.

I WISH WE’D HAD ADVANCE NOTICE THE SUNDAY THAT ELTON JOHN WAS HERE BECAUSE WE COULD HAVE HAD HIM SING SOMETHING FOR US HAD WE KNOWN HE WOULD BE HERE.

SPIDERMAN HAS BEEN A FAIRLY REGULAR ATTENDER BUT I ASSUME HE’S COME AS PETER PARKER & THAT’S WHY NO ONE EVER RECOGNIZED HIM.

I’M QUITE CERTAIN THAT SOMEONE WAS JUST CLOWNING AROUND WHEN THEY SIGNED IN AS SOCRATES BECAUSE I KNOW HE’S BEEN DEAD FOR A REALLY LONG TIME NOW.

I WON’T SAY THE SAME THING ABOUT THE TIMES ELVIS HAS BEEN HERE BECAUSE I GUESS, FOR SOME, THE JURY IS STILL OUT REGARDING *HIS* DEMISE.

THE POINT IS, OUR ATTENDANCE REGISTRATION PADS BRING OUT THE CREATIVITY IN MANY OF YOU.

I’VE BEEN SURPRISED, THOUGH, THAT I HAVEN’T NOTICED THE CELEBRITIES WHO VISIT US BECAUSE, MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, IT SEEMS AS THOUGH THEY’VE SIGNED THE PAD THAT’S RIGHT UP HERE IN THE PEW DIRECTLY IN FRONT OF THE PULPIT!

THIS PAST WEEK, THOUGH, AS WE GOT OUR LIST OF VISITORS ON MONDAY MORNING, THERE WAS A NAME THAT STOOD OUT FOR ME.

WONDER OF WONDERS – DIETRICH BONHOEFFER WAS HERE LAST SUNDAY!

NOW, FOR SOME OF YOU, THAT NAME MAY NOT BE ONE YOU RECOGNIZE.

FOR OTHERS OF YOU, IT’S A NAME YOU KNOW YOU’VE HEARD IN CHURCH CIRCLES BUT YOU’RE NOT SURE WHY.

STILL OTHERS OF YOU KNOW THAT DIETRICH BONHOEFFER WAS ONE OF THE GREATEST CHRISTIAN THINKERS & WRITERS OF THE 20TH CENTURY – A MAN WHO WROTE THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP & COINED THE TERMS “CHEAP GRACE” & “COSTLY GRACE.”

YOU KNOW THAT DIETRICH BONHOEFFER WAS A GERMAN WHO OPPOSED HITLER, WAS IMPRISONED & FINALLY EXECUTED FOR HIS CHRISTIAN BELIEFS & TEACHINGS.

WHEN I SAW THAT THE ATTENDANCE REGISTER HAD BEEN SIGNED WITH THAT NAME, I IMMEDIATELY KNEW WHO IT WAS.

IT WAS GEORGE WHO DID IT – NOT GEORGE BRUNNER, THOUGH IF HE WERE STILL ALIVE, HE WOULD HAVE BEEN A GOOD CANDIDATE TO DO SOMETHING LIKE THAT.

NO, THE GEORGE WHO SIGNED IN LAST WEEK AS DIETRICH BONHOEFFER WAS A VISITOR I SPOKE TO FOLLOWING WORSHIP WHO DIDN’T GIVE ME HIS LAST NAME.

THE REASON I KNEW IT WAS GEORGE IS BECAUSE HE WAS VISITING HIS SISTER HERE IN EVANSVILLE & SAW THE SERMON TITLE OUTSIDE & CAME TO FIND OUT HOW WE WOULD ADDRESS “SECULAR THEOLOGY.”

GEORGE IS A STUDENT AT UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY IN NEW YORK.

THAT HAPPENS TO BE THE SEMINARY WHERE DIETRICH BONHOEFFER SERVED AS AN INSTRUCTOR IN THE EARLY 1930’S.

HE RETURNED TO HIS HOMETLAND OF GERMANY BECAUSE HE DIDN’T THINK HE’D HAVE THE RIGHT TO ASSIST IN THE RE-BUILDING OF THE GERMAN CHURCH AFTER THE WAR IF HE HADN’T STAYED TO OPPOSE HITLER.

THE CONNECTION TO UNION SEMINARY IS HOW I KNOW IT WAS GEORGE WHO SIGNED IN AS BONHOEFFER – THAT & THE FACT THAT NO ONE NAMED GEORGE SIGNED ONE OF THE PADS & OTHERS WHO SIGNED THE PAD THAT BONHOEFFER SIGNED HAPPEN TO HAVE BEEN SITTING IN THE SAME PEW THAT GEORGE SAT IN!

I KNOW THAT GEORGE WASN’T COMPLETELY SATISFIED WITH WHAT HE HEARD LAST SUNDAY IN THE SERMON BECAUSE, AS I MENTIONED, THERE REALLY IS AN ENTIRE THEOLOGICAL MOVEMENT THAT IS REFERRED TO AS “SECULAR THEOLOGY” & THAT’S NOT AT ALL WHAT THE SERMON ADDRESSED & YET IT WAS THAT TITLE THAT ENTICED GEORGE TO WORSHIP WITH US.

I GAVE THOUGHT AFTER WORSHIP LAST WEEK TO PREACHING THIS FOLLOW-UP SERMON FOR GEORGE.

THAT WAS BEFORE I LEARNED THAT DIETRICH BONHOEFFER WAS WITH US.

THAT SENT MY MIND IN A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT DIRECTION.

WHO CARES WHAT GEORGE THOUGHT OF THE SERMON – WHAT WOULD DIETRICH BONHOEFFER HAVE THOUGHT OF IT?!

YOU SEE, WHILE BONHOEFFER WASN’T SOMEONE IN THE “SECULAR THEOLOGY” MOVEMENT, SOME OF THE THINGS HE SAID HAVE GREATLY INFLUENCED IT.

I THINK SOME OF THOSE THINGS GET AT THE HEART OF WHAT I’M TALKING ABOUT IN USING THAT PHRASE.

THOUGH HE DIED BEFORE HE HAD REALLY EXPLAINED WHAT HE MEANT BY IT, BONHOEFFER MADE REFERENCE TO WHAT HE CALLED “*RELIGIONLESS CHRISTIANITY.*”

THAT PHRASE – AND BONHOEFFER’S INTENT IN USING IT - HAS BEEN THE SOURCE OF A GREAT DEAL OF DEBATE FOR MORE THAN HALF A CENTURY.

PERSONALLY, I LIKE TO THINK THAT HE MEANT THAT IT’S TIME FOR CHRISTIANS TO GET OUT OF OUR IVORY TOWERS.

IT’S TIME TO GET BEYOND OUR WALLS & OUR TRAPPINGS.

IT’S TIME TO MOVE BEYOND THE SILLINESS THAT KEEPS CHRISTIANS DIVIDED & START FOCUSING ON THINGS THAT REALLY MATTER.

IN MODERN DAY PARLANCE, IT’S TIME TO “*QUIT TALKING THE TALK & START WALKING THE WALK.*”

YOU SEE, THIS IS WHY I HAVE LABELLED THESE TWO SERMONS “SECULAR THEOLOGY.”

I THINK THAT’S PRECISELY WHAT JESUS INTENDED.

NOW IT MAY SEEM AS THOUGH THERE ARE ANY NUMBER OF PASSAGES THAT WOULD BE BETTER SUITED TO EXPOUND ON THIS CONCEPT THAN A PASSAGE ON PRAYER!

AND YET, IF WE CAN SEE IT WHEN JESUS TALKS ABOUT PRAYER, THEN WE CAN SEE IT IN EVERYTHING ELSE HE SAID & DID.

AND FURTHERMORE, ANY MOVEMENT TOWARD GETTING OUT OF OUR IVORY TOWERS & CHURCH TRAPPINGS – ANY ACTION WE TAKE THAT WILL MOVE US BEYOND OUR SILLY DIVISIONS – ANY STEP WE TAKE TO MEANINGFULLY LIVE OUT OUR CHRISTIAN FAITH IN OUR DAILY LIFE WILL SURELY HAVE TO BEGIN WITH A GREAT DEAL OF PRAYER.

LAST WEEK I SUGGESTED THAT THIS PASSAGE TEACHES US A NUMBER OF IMPORTANT LESSONS ABOUT PRAYER IN GENERAL.

I ALSO SUGGESTED THAT THE TWO PARABLES JESUS USES ARE VITALLY IMPORTANT TO THAT UNDERSTANDING.

I SUGGESTED THAT THESE PARABLES ARE PERFECT EXAMPLES OF HIS “SECULAR THEOLOGY” – TRANSFORMING SOMETHING SACRED INTO EVERYDAY LIFE.

LET’S TAKE A LOOK AT THESE TWO PARABLES – AT LEAST THE FIRST ONE.

IN THIS PARABLE, JESUS TELLS A STORY THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN CLEARLY UNDERSTOOD BY HIS LISTENERS.

BASICALLY, HE SAYS, *“IMAGINE A SITUATION WHERE AN OLD FRIEND ARRIVES ON YOUR DOORSTEP AT MIDNIGHT AFTER A LONG JOURNEY.*

“YOU’VE GOT NO FOOD IN THE HOUSE SO YOU RUN NEXT DOOR & ASK A NEIGHBOR TO BALE YOU OUT OF A TOUGH SPOT.

“DO YOU THINK HE’S JUST GOING TO SAY, ‘GET LOST. I CAN’T DO ANYTHING TO HELP YOU. YOU’RE ON YOUR OWN.’

“OF COURSE HE’S NOT. HE’S GOING TO GIVE YOU WHAT YOU NEED. EVEN IF WON’T DO IT BECAUSE HE’S YOUR FRIEND, HE’LL DO IT SO THE REST OF THE NEIGHBORS WON’T THINK ILL OF HIM.”

IN A MIDDLE EASTERN COMMUNITY, HOSPITALITY IS TREMENDOUSLY IMPORTANT.

WHEN A GUEST ARRIVES – WHETHER THEY’RE EXPECTED OR NOT – FOOD WILL BE OFFERED.

IT DOESN’T MATTER WHAT TIME OF DAY – OR NIGHT - IT IS.

A GUEST IN THE HOME MEANS FOOD ON THE TABLE.

NOT TO DO SO WOULD BE A TERRIBLE BREACH OF HOSPITALITY.

AND, CONVERSELY, FOR THE GUEST TO REFUSE THE HOSPITALITY WOULD BE AN EVEN GREATER OFFENSE!

WHETHER THE VISITOR IS HUNGRY OR NOT, HE IS OFFERED FOOD & HE MUST EAT.

I EXPERIENCED THIS A NUMBER OF YEARS AGO WHEN WE WERE IN EGYPT.

WE ENGAGED THE SERVICES OF A CAB DRIVER FOR THE ENTIRE DAY & HE TOOK US AROUND CAIRO TO SEE THE SITES.

AT THE END OF THE DAY, HE INSISTED WE VISIT HIM IN HIS HOME.

HE WENT RUNNING INTO HIS HOUSE & TOLD HIS WIFE & CHILDREN HE'D BROUGHT GUESTS HOME WITH HIM & HE THEN PROCEEDED TO RUN TO THE ROOF & GRAB A CHICKEN THAT WOULD SERVE AS OUR EVENING MEAL!

HE WAS GOING TO BE A HOSPITABLE HOST & WE WERE EXPECTED TO BE HOSPITABLE GUESTS BY EATING THAT CHICKEN THAT HE KILLED BEFORE OUR VERY EYES!

HOSPITALITY IS VITALLY IMPORTANT IN THE MIDDLE EAST!

PERHAPS THE BEST WAY TO TRANSLATE THIS PARABLE INTO TERMS WE CAN UNDERSTAND WOULD BE TO SAY, *"SUPPOSE YOUR NEIGHBOR CAME TO YOU IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT & BEGGED TO USE YOUR PHONE BECAUSE HIS HOUSE WAS ON FIRE & HE WANTED TO CALL THE FIRE DEPARTMENT. WOULD YOU TELL HIM 'NO' BECAUSE YOU DIDN'T WANT TO AWAKEN THE CHILDREN?"*

YOU WOULDN'T EVEN THINK OF DENYING SUCH A REQUEST & NEITHER WOULD THIS NEIGHBOR IN THE PARABLE JESUS TELLS.

WITHIN THIS STORY, JESUS USES THE WORD "FRIEND" 4 TIMES.

THERE'S THE FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN THE MAN & HIS LATE-NIGHT VISITORS & THE FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN THE MAN & HIS NEIGHBOR.

WHAT JESUS SEEMS TO BE SUGGESTING IS THAT THERE IS A SIMILAR RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN US & GOD. WE CAN APPROACH GOD AS A FRIEND.

WE CAN GO TO GOD AT ANY TIME – EVEN IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT & GOD WILL – AS A FRIEND – RESPOND TO WHATEVER WE NEED.

GOD IS LIKE A SLEEPING NEIGHBOR, TRIPPING OVER HIS CHILDREN IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT TO ANSWER US.

THIS IS THE SECULAR THEOLOGY OF JESUS – TAKING SOMETHING AS SACRED AS PRAYER & PUTTING IT INTO THE VERY MIDST OF DAILY LIFE.

THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE SIGNIFICANT ABOUT THIS PARABLE.

THE WORD THAT IS TRANSLATED AS "PERSISTENCE" IN THE NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION IS MORE APPROPRIATELY TRANSLATED AS "SHAMELESS."

I THINK BOTH TRANSLATIONS WORK.

THE MAN IS "PERSISTENT" IN HIS REQUEST & HE IS "SHAMELESS" AS WELL.

THIS PARABLE DOESN'T OFFER A LESSON IN THE RIGHT TECHNIQUE IN PRAYER.

IT'S NOT A LESSON IN USING THE RIGHT WORDS OR MAINTAINING THE PROPER POSTURE.

IT DOESN'T TELL YOU THE BEST TIME OF DAY FOR PRAYER.

IT'S A LESSON IN PERSISTENCE.

EFFECTIVE PRAYER IS PERSISTENT PRAYER.

IT MEANS DOING IT REGULARLY.

THE PERSISTENCE THAT JESUS IS SUGGESTING HERE IS NOT THE PERSISTENCE OF “BUGGING” GOD UNTIL GOD ANSWERS.

IT’S THE PERSISTENCE OF STAYING IN A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AS OUR HEAVENLY FATHER.

HE MEANS WE’RE SUPPOSED TO STICK WITH IT – WE’RE TO KEEP DOING IT.

I THINK THE OTHER WAY TO TRANSLATE THIS WORD – “SHAMELESS” IS ALSO SIGNIFICANT.

THE WORD “SHAMELESS” IS MOST OFTEN HEARD IN OUR HOUSE WHEN DREW & MARIE ARE VISITING WITH THEIR DOG, TRUCKER.

TRUCKER IS A “SHAMELESS BEGGAR” AT THE TABLE.

HE’LL JUST SIT THERE & LOOK LONGINGLY – AS IF HE HAS THE RIGHT TO GET SOMETHING FROM YOU.

HE MAY HAVE JUST EATEN A BOWL OF HIS OWN FOOD.

IT DOESN’T MATTER.

HE’S STILL GOING TO BEG FOR SOMETHING YOU’VE GOT IN *YOUR* BOWL.

HE MAY HAVE JUST MISBEHAVED HORRIBLY.

IT DOESN’T MATTER.

HE’S STILL GOING TO PLAY THE ROLE OF A “SHAMELESS BEGGAR.”

FOR SOME OF US, THIS MAY BE THE MOST IMPORTANT MESSAGE OF ALL IN THIS PASSAGE.

I THINK THERE ARE THOSE WHO ARE HESITANT TO PRAY BECAUSE THEY KNOW THEY AREN’T WORTHY OF ASKING ANYTHING OF GOD.

MAYBE THAT’S YOU.

MAYBE YOU KNOW YOU’RE NOT LIVING AS GOD INTENDS YOU TO LIVE.

MAYBE YOU’RE STRUGGLING – AND FAILING - TO OVERCOME A PARTICULAR SIN IN YOUR LIFE.

WHAT JESUS IS SAYING HERE IS THAT IT DOESN’T MATTER.

LIKE TRUCKER AT OUR DINNER TABLE, GOD WANTS US TO BE “SHAMELESS BEGGARS” IN OUR PRAYERS.

NO MATTER WHO YOU ARE & WHAT YOU’VE DONE, GOD INVITES YOU TO APPROACH HIM IN PRAYER.

DON’T LET ANYTHING – ANYTHING – KEEP YOU FROM MAINTAINING A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD THROUGH PRAYER.

IN THIS PARABLE, JESUS TRANSFORMS SOMETHING AS SACRED AS PRAYER INTO A REAL LIFE DRAMA TO HELP US UNDERSTAND IT.

THIS IS THE SECULAR THEOLOGY OF JESUS.

I THINK IT’S WHAT DIETRICH BONHOEFFER HAD IN MIND WHEN HE TALKED ABOUT “RELIGIONLESS CHRISTIANITY.”

AND I’M AFRAID I MUST TELL YOU THAT I’VE DONE IT AGAIN.

WHEN WE BEGAN OUR EXAMINATION OF THIS PASSAGE LAST WEEK, I HAD INTENDED TO TAKE A LOOK AT PRAYER IN GENERAL, THE LORD'S PRAYER IN PARTICULAR & THE TWO PARABLES JESUS OFFERS THE DISCIPLES TO OFFER THEM SOME GUIDANCE.

TWO WEEKS IN NOW & WE STILL HAVEN'T REALLY LOOKED AT THE LORD'S PRAYER OR THE SECOND PARABLE, NOR HAVE WE EVEN MENTIONED PERHAPS THE MOST WELL-KNOWN WORDS OF THE PASSAGE – “ASK, SEEK, KNOCK.”

IF “TOY STORY” & “SHREK” WARRANT A THIRD & EVEN FOURTH GO-ROUND THIS SUMMER, SURELY THIS PASSAGE OF SCRIPTURE DOES AS WELL!

WE'LL DO SO NEXT WEEK. AMEN.

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