

Sunday, May 24, 2009: We Sure Could Use a Little Good News Today

“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.” 1 John 4:7-12

This is one of my favorite passages, I discovered it when I was a young Christian and it has spoken to me over the years. This intimate letter, written by the Apostle John when he was an old man, is in part a corrective epistle against the then common heresy of Gnosticism. The Gnostics denied the humanity of Christ, saying that He was fully spiritual and only appeared to become human. The church’s emphasis on fully human and fully divine is foundational to the truth of the faith — Jesus’ redemptive work would have been a sham had He not truly become one of us. We relate as believers to the God who completely knows and understands the extent and limits of our humanity — not some unknowable God who sits apart and dictates to us.

In this passage from 1 John 4, John is simply declaring the transforming power of God’s love — the highlight of which was God’s choice to send his only Son into the world so that we might become one with Him and live with Him. John underscores that God initiated love, it was He, not us and sent His Son to atone for our sins, in other words, make us right and acceptable in God’s sight. This is foundational Christianity, as basic as it gets. John’s simple writing style belies the depth of this truth, which, John knew would transform the world after he died and had already begun to do so. But how?

John already knew that God’s vessel of transformation and restoration was the actions of the believers and so, he tells them and us, to love one another. Jesus spoke it as a command, John speaks slightly more obliquely: as we love one another, he wrote, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. God’s love, growing and showing in us, is not just for us, it is the designated means God will use to restore His order to this broken world. So this is not just a recommendation, this is the recipe for renewal, the marching orders for God’s eternal plan.

What is love and how do we show it? Most important, I think, God is telling us to reach beyond ourselves, care more than just about ourselves or our special people. Pay attention to the people God puts in your path. Cut out the superficial judgments, dig to find out who the real person is. Find out what makes them tick. As we show love in our actions, not simple words, some people will open up. In time we may get to share — so we also need to learn to share the effect God’s love has had in our lives.

This is God’s plan for evangelism, if you will — to use millions of us as personal ambassadors to millions of others and so to expand God’s family until God has achieved the complete renewal of God’s people and the human race. It’s a huge task — like building the Great Wall of China. We’re laborers, working one brick at a time the task will get done. It is my privilege to be a laborer in this greatest of all projects. Thanks for reading…

Nick