

An email this week brought some modern proverbs:

- \* Don't let your worries get the best of you. Remember Moses started out as a basket case.
- \* It is easier to preach ten sermons than to live one.

Our New Testament passage today is probably one of the more recognized passages in Scripture. It is found in greetings cards, used on posters and read at many weddings. It speaks to the very foundation of our faith: "*God is love*" (I John 4:16b). The question though is, "How do we love?" This is really caught in the second proverb, "It is easier to preach ten sermons than to live one."

Today, we examine Paul's most excellent way. It is the spirit of why and how we do things and how we live out our lives in Christian sincerity. Do we just go through the motions or do we really mean what we say and do?

I was in a local store this past week and the clerk did not seem to want to wait on me. I was looking for something she had to get for me. It was not as if the store was filled with customers, I was the only one. Yet, it seemed like I was inconveniencing her by needing her to assist me. Had I not needed the item I was after I would have left the store and found another. I wonder if this is not how the world perceives Christians on many days? We go through the motions, talk a good talk, nod and give our assent, but when it comes to getting our hands dirty...

Dr. Steve Van Ostran comments in a recent National Ministries, Mission in America, on his participation in the Children in Poverty initiative. Though the program has been around for a while he has not seen it as a priority until now. He writes

So, frankly, as a regional executive, I haven't done much about the Children in Poverty initiative—but that is about to change.

You see, as I have grown in this calling, I have come to witness and to be convicted that the real problem with many of our churches today is a loss of identity. They [churches] have forgotten they are "the body of Christ." They have forgotten they are "the hands and feet of Jesus." I, too, have been a part of that church.

As I encourage churches to remember their identity, I am reminded of Christ's words, "Suffer the little children to come unto me," and of the parable he spoke that ends, "As often as you do it unto the least of these my children you do it unto me." As long as I remember this, I am convicted of the need to make a difference in the lives of children in poverty, even if it is only one, because that child is the Christ child.

Love entered the picture.

Paul calls on Christians to do everything out of love. It should be the very foundation of our actions. Our God works out of love. Christ came not because we were worthy or because we deserved redemption. He came because God is love.

Love should be the very foundation of all our actions. Love should be expressed in our every deed and word. Paul encourages the congregation at Corinth (and all who read his letter) to renew their vow of love and to live out a life of love.

These are the foundation stones of our lives: faith, hope and love.

Faith is the unseen power that sustains our lives. We believe not in what we see but in the endless possibilities of love. Faith says that God loves us even when we are unlovable. Faith says that Christ died for us—and our actions are in response to that love. We love because we have been loved. Faith allows us to walk through the valleys and towards the mountain peaks with the assurance that they are there. Faith allows us to love.

Faith is assisted by hope. Hope that in the midst of the valleys there are mountain peaks ahead. My grandmother loved to ride in her car, but only in the daylight. She always made sure that trips were planned so that driving was done during the day. Even short trips around town at night were tolerated but not welcomed. I remember one trip we took to North Carolina to my cousin's wedding. We had planned it so that our driving would be done during the day. However, there was one day when we did not make that goal. I looked over and saw how nervous she was. She looked at me and said, "Do you know where we are?" I did. She relaxed a little but until we reached our destination she had a concern. Hope says God knows where we are – even when we don't.

Hope says we know we can change the world, even if only one life at a time. Hope is the sunshine in the darkness of many days. The news this week showed a taxi driver in Haiti. He was waiting for a fare. As he waited he took a guitar from his car, sat on the hood and began to sing a song of hope. Soon he was joined in the singing by others. There in the midst of rubble and despair were Haitian voices singing a song of hope.

It is this faith and hope that have countless American Baptists in Haiti this morning helping to rebuild a broken country. It is this faith that has teams of American Baptists and others waiting to go to Haiti to help in the rebuilding process. Our Evergreen Association is working to put a team together to go to Haiti sometime in the fall of 2010 – it is hope that we are planning teams into 2011.

Why faith and hope? Because of God's love. Our faith and hope is empowered and powered by the love of our God toward all creation. We are here because someone loved us and demonstrated God's love to us. God is love and our way must be one of love.

Think about a visitor to Jesus one night. He came not wanting to be seen by others in the religious establishment. He wanted to find out more about this young rabbi without the crowds. He wanted some one to one time with Jesus. Imagine all the images from the Old Testament that Jesus could have used to describe God. But as he met with Nicodemus he chose these words, "*For God so loved the world...*" Can we do any less?

The General Secretary of the ABC, A. Roy Medley, told this story at Paul Aita's 40<sup>th</sup> Ordination Celebration (he had borrowed it from Paul and so I borrow it from them both!).

A congregation was having a special celebration and as part of the celebration a young woman was to sing a solo. When the moment came she stepped to the appropriate place and the

accompanist began the introduction. At the moment when she was supposed to sing there came only silence. Being a good accompanist she went back to the beginning and started the introduction again. As she reached the point where the young woman was to sing again there was nothing. She began again. As she began an older member of the choir stepped down and put her arm around the young woman. When the accompanist reached the part where the solo was to begin she began to sing. As she sang the young woman began to find her voice and started to sing. As the young woman's voice grew stronger the older woman's voice grew softer until only the vibrant sounds of the young woman's voice filled the sanctuary.

**“And now faith, hope and love abide, but the greatest of these is love.”**

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Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quoted is from NRSV, NCCC/USA 1989  
NIY, New International Bible Society, Zondervan, 1989  
National Ministries, Mission in America, December 2009