



Rev. Dr. Craig Lindsey

Sunday, February 16, 2020

What Is Underneath

I need to ask for your help. I am told that repeatedly as changes and challenges were faced the mantra at VPC became "When the new Pastor arrives..." We will fix not having 3 Pastors and an Administrator, we will address the Congregational Care System coordinating committees, the Austerity Budget, we will fix the Ice Machine, and we will fix the Sound System... UNDERNEATH all of which is the question from our PNC: Can we be loved anew?

We have been together nineteen weeks, during which we have celebrated Missionary Sunday, Stephens Ministry Sunday, Congregational Care Sunday, Missions Sunday, Cantata and Christmas; The staff has found homes for 500 of 800 hymnals I ordered, the Ice Machine is Repaired! And We are working on the Sound System! But folks, we cannot go from a bicycle using Training Wheels, to pop the clutch driving a car in 5th gear on Interstate 19!

My concern is that Stephens Ministry has asked that I be retrained this week, so please, while I am gone: do not have Session meetings, purchase more hymnals, or fire me in my absence. Pastor Diane and the Session, Deacons and staff, are here with you, I will be back with you next Sunday. AND if you receive emails saying I need you to buy Gift Cards, Do Not do it!

According to the Creation Story in Genesis: God formed Creation, then formed a Creature out of that creation. **God formed Adam to be in relationship to God.** Are you with me so far? Because as simplistic and basic as that sounds, underneath everything in Human History, in Christian Theology, Eschatology, Ontology and Cosmology, the basic foundational premise is that **"God loves us!" God wants nothing more than that we would love God.** Yet God understood we also needed companionship like us, so God created every living creature, but none were right so God separated the one creature into two, that we would need one another, help one another, love one another.

Last week my brother, also a PK, sent me a text quoting the old misconception that the God of the Old Testament was wrathful and the New Testament Jesus is loving... However, there is only one God. The history of the First Testament is that we humans have had a difficult time loving God and one another. For generations our ancestors had been slaves. Slaves follow instruction of what to do and what not to do. When freed, instead of dominating or forcing God gave us 10 Commandments, as Two sets of Laws carved in stone. One with Laws governing our loving God: Make no Idols, Keep the Sabbath; the second set: Laws restricting our actions to prevent us harming one another. The 10 Commandments were to have been our Training Wheels as we learned to love God and love one another. But remember why we were formed, and why we were given the Laws... to be in relationship with God and one another.

Unfortunately, Human Will looks at a sign saying 75 mph, and we do not consider who is behind the Law, or why, we do not consider whether other drivers need to get somewhere, and too often we neglect the construction workers on the roadside, we think of the Law as a static thing to get around by putting ourselves ahead of everyone else. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus connected the dots for us of WHO & WHAT is underneath the Law. That "Thou shalt not Kill" is instruction to not be angry with one another. "Thou shalt not Covet" is demand from God that we not Lust after what the other has.

Years ago, I was trying to teach this to a Confirmation Class, when one student said to another “You idiot, you cannot call another person a fool.” The point is not the words, the point is not the Law, underneath everything else, GOD LOVES US AND WANTS US TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

I have heard it quoted that “The Bible says, An eye for an Eye” meaning if you do me wrong I can kill you. When actually underneath “an eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth” means that if you cause me to lose a tooth, the worst I can do is cause you to lose a tooth as well, not seeking greater vengeance. There was a man who was lacking in all social skills. At Committee meetings he would throw papers and storm out. He would telephone people to berate them. On Christmas Eve, he became so angry, as the pastor, he spit in my face. In the Choir loft he screamed profanity. So I took him aside and asked “Why do you do this?” He replied, “I cannot react that way to my mother, or at my job, so I act as awful as I have wanted to elsewhere whenever I get to Church, because you have to forgive me.” The Session met to consider how to respond, whether to call the Police, whether to have an order of protection against him or to have a trial of church discipline? Ultimately, the Session called a special meeting and invited the man to come with two witnesses. As the Pastor I was instructed to be quiet, as anything I said would have set him off. A friend of his on Session began reading a three page list of unexcusable offenses. Then the Session said, “We recognize that of all people you need the church, you need to be loved, we want you here. But when acting like this, you cannot act as a role model, so you cannot sing in the choir, or serve on a committee, until you get professional medical help to deal with your anger. If you cannot afford this, we will pay your bills to get the help you need.”

You have heard it said “If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn and offer them your left.” Because in order to have hit you on the right cheek, the other person would have had to slap you down with the back of their hand where rings and knuckles can do their worst. In the ancient world with a caste system, those of lower degree kissed the back of your hand, or received it in rebuke; while your equals or better received the touch of your palm. By offering your other cheek, they have to use their palm to you.

Our church was formed 40 years ago, organized by denominations wanting to have a church in Green Valley. But in the 1700s and early 1800s Missionaries were sent out from a church to developing farm communities, to establish “Religious Societies.” The point of the Religious Society Movement was not only to form a Church, but as neighbors to provide 3 things. Before there were Public Schools, you met with your neighbors as the church to learn to read and write. Before there were Churches, you met with your neighbor to hear one another’s confession, because you could not do so on your own. And third, before there were Civil and Criminal Courts, you came together as the Church to settle disputes. The point being, NOT who was in the wrong and who owed whom what; but instead, there is hurt between you, what will it take to forgive, to become a communion.

In Roman Society, a soldier could force you to carry a load 1 mile but no further. So if it is demanded you carry another’s burden voluntarily carry it two miles, meaning that they did not force you, you did so. If some one was so much in need that they begged your cloak from you, give them your coat also means to give without restraint, give them everything you can, because they were in need.

A few of you have heard me tell the story that there was a Church, where two members of Session got into a fight. Afterward, one came to the Session to confess that he had done wrong by fighting with his brother. The Session responded by saying “It takes two for a fight, where is the other?” But he responded that he was in the right and had nothing to confess or be judged for. For the next five years,

there were two separate First Presbyterian Churches in that community, both in the same building at different times, with two separate choirs, two Sessions, and the pastor trying to minister to each. The only evidence was in the Session Record Book, there were numerous pages ripped out, and on the next page was the inscription, "We have done wrong to one another by dividing the Church, we have crucified God. We repent, and we are beginning anew."

There is always more than the words that are said, listen for what is underneath, always knowing You ARE LOVED; LOVE ONE ANOTHER.