

“Family Values”

UCC at The Villages, FL
December 27th, 2015
1st Sun. after Christmas

Colossians 3:12-17

Luke 2:41-52

[The Apostle Paul said,]

Therefore, as God's choice, holy and [beloved ones],
put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Let us pray... O God,

In a world of diverse faiths and philosophies,

help us to know what we believe and who we are in that mix.

In a world of challenging circumstances,

help us remember who you are and that you're always with us.

In a world of indifference,

send us out to teach your loving-kindness by following your example.

Amen

Francis Schaeffer was a conservative Christian author

and the founder of the L'Abri community in Switzerland

that now includes 'study centers' throughout the world.

Sarah Young who wrote the Jesus Calling devotional

committed her life to Christ at such a community in France.

One of the principal books written by Francis Schaeffer was,

The Christian Manifesto which was a call to encourage Christians

'to compete in the free marketplace of ideas' – including the arts.

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He was especially concerned about humanism and liberal Christianity
as decadent influences on society.

So, I don't think he would have been supportive

of the United Church of Christ's position on many social issues.

However, I do believe the UCC needs to take up his challenge

to get involved, to get in the conversation, to get in the competition
of 'the free marketplace of ideas.'

By doing so, we enter as equals – not as extremists who are so sure of their position
that they shut down the discussion with unassailable arguments.

More often than not, we are all trying to figure out the truth for a given situation
and should welcome diverse opinions.

In our Gospel lesson today, we are told that Jesus *listened* and *asked questions* –

and that his questions were just as amazing to the adults at the Temple,
as the answers he gave to their questions.

The point being is that Jesus exercised humility and wisdom

in his willingness to listen and learn – though I don't think his response
to his parents helped keep him out of trouble

when they finally caught up to him after three days...

Willard, p.2

The Gospel tells us that Jesus grew up, obedient to the teachings of his mother & father and earned the respect of the people who knew him as someone who had God's 'favor'.

When the time came, Jesus would gather people as his disciples to teach them – not only the principles of salvation, but how to live together as a faith community, imitating the beloved community of God's Kingdom 'on Earth as it is in Heaven'.

That work continued as the disciples themselves went out as apostles – or missionaries, to teach people about God through Christ sharing the songs & stories about him as well how to pray and find healing from all oppression.

Our epistle lesson today is such an example, as the Apostle Paul told the Colossians to 'put on' or wear 'compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience' like a garment and mantled with "love".

He reminded them to be tolerant, forgiving, and to be thankful with the goal of allowing the 'peace of Christ' to control their hearts – to control their conscious lives.

Furthermore, Paul said,

"The word of Christ must live in you richly"

and to help that happen, he urged them to...

"Teach and warn each other with all wisdom

by singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

Sing to God with gratitude in your hearts"

keeping in mind that no matter what we do, in word or deed, we should do it all in Jesus' name, again giving thanks to God.

We should do everything as if God is watching through the ceiling...

Paul did not assume the Christians in Colossae were perfect, but reminded them and urged them to live in this way – and his words are meant for us, too, as we seek to learn and perfect ourselves as a faith community and be sustained as they were in their day.

Every so often – as Christians and as a congregation, we need a refresher course in how to be better Christians and healthier congregations.

What better source for this purpose would there be than to look to Jesus himself and his principal 'manifesto' – the Sermon on the Mount.

I am now going to share with you my interpretation of a portion of that sermon in which Jesus himself reinterpreted some of God's commandments to be heard in a new way...

Willard. p.3

Inspired by Matthew 5:21-48

[Jesus said,]

YOU HAVE HEARD THAT IT WAS SAID,
‘THOU SHALT LOVE THY NEIGHBOR’ AND
‘THOU SHALT HATE THINE ENEMY.’
BUT I SAY TO YOU,
LOVE YOUR ENEMIES AND
PRAY FOR THOSE WHO MISTREAT YOU,
SO THAT YOU MAY BECOME
CHILDREN OF YOUR HEAVENLY GUARDIAN.
FOR GOD HAS MADE
THE SUN TO SHINE UPON THE EVIL AND THE GOOD;
THE RAIN TO FALL UPON THE JUST AND THE UNJUST.
SO, IF YOU LOVE [ONLY] THOSE WHO LOVE YOU,
ISN’T THAT ITS OWN REWARD?
EVEN THIEVES AND TRAITORS DO THIS.
AND IF YOU [WELCOME ONLY] THOSE WHO ARE LIKE YOU
WHAT [IS] NOBLE ABOUT THAT?
YET, ISN’T THIS WHAT THE EXTREMISTS DO?
INSTEAD, PERFECT YOURSELF IN THIS WAY –
BY PRACTICING GOD’S PERFECT WAY OF LOVING-KINDNESS.

The Pilgrims’ pastor John Robinson said that he believed there was
‘more light and truth to break forth from God’s holy Word’ –
and I believe that is still true.

When Jesus set forth on his journey to Jerusalem to face crucifixion,
he sent out 72 missionaries ahead of him,
not to set up accommodations for the night,
but to lay the groundwork for setting up faith communities
that would follow Jesus after his return to Heaven.

We are ‘the 72’ in this time and place as we learn more about Christ and the Church,
as we learn the songs & stories of our tradition’s ‘family values’ of the Gospel,
and as we enter the competition of “the free marketplace of ideas”.

It is up to every generation to bring insight to what these old teachings are about
so they can be heard and applied – or manifested in new ways.

Amen

*Our lesson today from Colossians 3:12-17 describes the ideals
of the early Christian community –
without assuming they themselves were perfect.
Even the first Christians had to be reminded to live up to their best selves...*

[The Apostle Paul said,]

[12] Therefore, as God's choice, holy and [beloved ones],
put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

[13] Be tolerant with each other and,
if someone has a complaint against anyone, forgive each other.
As the Lord forgave you, so also forgive each other.

[14] And over all these things put on love,
which is the perfect bond of unity.

[15] The peace of Christ must control your hearts—
a peace into which you were called in one body.
And be thankful people.

[16] The word of Christ must live in you richly.
Teach and warn each other with all wisdom
by singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.
Sing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

[17] Whatever you do, whether in speech or action,
do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus
and give thanks to God the Father through him.

Let us be challenged and guided by these words...

Luke 2:41-52

[41] Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover.

[42] And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom;

[43] and when the feast was ended, as they were returning,
the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem.

His parents did not know it,

[44] but supposing him to be in the company they went a day's journey,
and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintances;

[45] and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem,
seeking him.

[46] After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers,
listening to them and asking them questions;

[47] and all who heard him were amazed
at his understanding and his answers.

[48] And when they saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him,
"Son, why have you treated us so?

Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously."

[49] And he said to them,

"How is it that you sought me?

Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

[50] And they did not understand the saying which he spoke to them.

[51] And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them;
and his mother kept all these things in her heart.

[52] And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature,
and in favor with God and [people].