

Wednesday Devotional, 3/3

Good evening, and welcome to this Facebook Live Lenten Devotional. I'm Pastor Bill Reinhart, and I'm really glad that you decided to join me tonight. Let's begin by inclining our hearts toward God in prayer.

Holy one and author of love, we continue tonight our resolve to grow in following you, the way of love. What we really want and need is not just words about love. We want and need to be transformed, changed from the inside-out by your Holy Spirit. So come, Holy Spirit, come! Inspire us with your Holy imagination to dream your dreams and act as your people, courageously living the way of love. Amen.

Our video tonight comes from Fred VanDerWerf, the Southern-Prarie District Superintendent. The videos are posted on the Minnesota Annual Conference website and there are also links to the videos on our church website.

[Play Video: Love is the Way: Chapters 3&4 \(8:30\)](#)

Wow, I really loved that reflection from Fred VanDerWerf. Fred, incidentally, is a gifted evangelist and preacher, and he obviously understands the most fundamental keys to evangelism. Sharing the Good News really works best when it's shared through personal relationships, like his relationship with Sergei and the students he disciplined while he was a missionary in the Ukraine. But just as importantly, evangelism is only effective to the extent that we ourselves represent that Good News.

That's what I loved about Fred's answer to Bishop Curry's question: Can love really change the world? I don't know, but I do know that love is changing me! Is love changing us? That's probably a better question, because we have the greatest power to change ourselves, and it's when we let God's love change us, from the inside out, that we find our lives influencing and changing the lives of others. Ghandi didn't really say, "Be the change you want to see," as pithy as that is. He said instead, "If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change." Isn't that true of love?

I appreciated Fred's confessional illustration of how quickly the story of the people of the Ukraine became his story while he was a missionary there. Normally, we think of that as an unqualified good thing, especially for a preacher who has to present the Gospel with as much of the context of the local culture as possible. That's just as true for Buffalo, MN as it

is for that City in the Ukraine. Let's reflect for a bit about Fred's assertion that simply waking up in our culture forms our attitudes and actions. That's undoubtedly true, isn't it?

What's the first thing you do when you wake up in the morning? I go downstairs and start a pot of coffee, and while I'm waiting for that, I usually glance over the headlines. And what do you suppose I see in the headlines? Political invective of all sorts; Bad news about the weather; Notable acts of violence, like the shooting at the Allina Clinic; and advertisements and reviews for the latest and greatest objects that money can buy. Wow.

So here's the cultural narrative that I'm filling my heart with as I drink my coffee: The way to govern is to call your political opponents names and to legislate to the needs of the few with the greatest influence, wealth, and power. Living in God's creation is a coin-toss, with natural disasters of all kinds claiming lives and destroying property no matter where you live. Being in relationship with other people is inherently dangerous, especially people you might disagree with, because they very well may show up with a gun some day and shoot you and your colleagues. And the best way to have a fulfilling life is to earn or borrow as much money as possible to purchase as much as possible.

Can you see how that morning routine, repeated 365 days a year for 58 years could really take hold on my heart? How about you? What are the stories from your culture that your taking in as surely as your morning breakfast? Do you really want those stories to become your stories? We do have a choice!

Fred quoted Bishop Curry as saying, "The only people who ever changed anything for the good, are those who have dared to dream an alternative reality." Where do you suppose that alternative reality comes from? Probably not Hulu, Amazon, Netflix, or Disney Plus. I know I shouldn't be, but I still find myself surprised at how often a Scripture and devotional message in the morning carries me through my day, giving me new eyes to filter the events of the day through. And it doesn't take much. Recently it was a short Psalm that I had prayed through that reminded me that I was walking the way of love with the God who promised to never forsake me. The Holy Scriptures are full of visions of alternate realities, but unless we're rehearsing them regularly, they get drowned out by the constant cultural bombardments throughout each day.

Bishop Curry apparently likes to sing Scripture, especially “There is a Balm in Gilead,” because it powerfully centers him in God’s alternate reality, the way of love. I’ll bet many of you do the same thing. Scripture can be so powerful when it’s put to music. What I find myself singing more and more is this:

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus; there's just something about that name.

Master, Savior, Jesus, like the fragrance after the rain;

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, let all Heaven and earth proclaim

Kings and kingdoms will all pass away,

But there's something about that name.

I’ve never really asked why I sing that, but in reflection now, I think I tend to sing when I need to most remember the truth in it: It’s not the circumstances of my day that define my eternal reality, but the beautiful, powerful, graceful, and enduring name of Jesus. Jesus himself is the way of love. That’s the vision that I want shaping my days, not what the morning news stream tells me.

There’s one more thing that Fred said that I want to respond to. He said, “It’s entirely possible to be citizens of the same country and have two completely different experiences.” I think we’ve all learned how true that is over the last four years and especially this last year. I can’t recall ever feeling such confusion and disorientation in marking how radically different our various perspectives are in this country regarding politics, race, policing, the economy, and the coronavirus. And it’s not just international and national divisions. Our state is divided. Our cities are divided. Our church is divided. And even our families are divided. I wonder how it is that we arrived at this point of such exaggerated differences?

If we take a cue from Fred, perhaps it’s that we’re all doing what comes most naturally- allowing ourselves to be shaped by the microcultures that we live in- the friends we hang out with, the television we watch, the families we grew up in- any number of the factors that form who we are and what we think.

I wonder what could happen if we challenged ourselves to identify and question the convictions that have led us to draw such sharp lines in the sand. What could happen if we were courageous enough to do a bit of a vision check. How well do our most firm convictions match the dreams God casts for the way of love? Do I believe this because I

simply believe this, or do I believe this because it's a clear expression of how I see God's vision for the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Love? Does it lift up the least, the lost, and the left out? The oppressed and downtrodden? The orphan and the widow? Or does it primarily serve me and the culture I live in?

Perhaps it's naïve to think that our country could wake up and hit the reset button in that way. Perhaps it's too much to expect for Buffalo United Methodist Church. But I know that by the grace of God, it is within my power to strive for that myself. And perhaps that's all that any of us are truly responsible for with these kind of changes. How about you? Why do you believe and act the ways you do? Why do you feel so strongly? And are your beliefs and feelings firmly rooted in the way of love?

Thanks for joining me for tonight's devotion. I hope you'll hop on over to Zoom for our 7:00 discussion group, where the discussion group will be continuing the conversation about chapters 3 and 4. Go with the Spirit and Love of Christ. Amen.



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