

“Just Say Yes To Multiethnic Faith Communities”

Psalm 130

2 Corinthians 8:7-15

Mark 5:21-43

In her book *The Gift of Thanks*, Margaret Visser lifts-up the power of gratitude by using the images of soil, lubricant, and glue. Visser writes:

[Soil] refers to the disposition of the person to be grateful his [their] freedom to [be] ungrateful, by contrast, is hard and dry, not easily moved by kindness, unwilling to be kind in return” Gratitude is [also] a social “lubricant” It makes things move smoothly; after all, giving and giving back are movements back and forth When there is no gratitude, there is no meaningful movement; [relationships] become rocky, painful, coldly indifferent, unpleasant, and finally break off altogether. The social “machinery” grinds to a halt. [Finally] ... gratitude is “glue.” The image points again to the social cohesion that gratitude supplies. Modern society is experienced as fragmented, in danger of flying apart ... Gratitude is “a kind of plastic filler,” “an all-purpose moral cement,” a sort of magic paste that is amazingly malleable, squeezing itself into the cracks and then solidifying and strengthening the social structure.¹

Gratitude is the social lubricant to foster meaningful exchange to keep interaction moving in the right direction.

In Mark 5:30, 34, Jesus responds to being touched by a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years, “Who touched my clothes? ... Daughter, your faith has made you well.” Martin Luther King, Jr, in his April 16, 1963, *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, writes,

Was not Jesus an extremist for love: “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them who hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you”? Was not Amos an extremist for justice: Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream”? Was not Paul an extremist for the Christian gospel: “I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus”?

¹Margaret Visser, *The Gift of Thanks* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009), 327-328.

Was not Martin Luther an extremist: “Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise, so help me God”?²

In the citation just read, Martin Luther King, Jr. points us in the right direction. And that direction? To touch and be touched by Jesus so that our words and deeds promote love, not hate.

We are to be grateful for our ongoing encounter with Jesus so that we continue to be sacrificial Christians and churches as opposed to religious people and social clubs. Psalm 130:1, 5 reads, “Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD. I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope.” 2 Corinthians 8:13-14 reads, “I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there be a fair balance.” In sacrifice, individual Christians and churches are generous in word and deed when it comes to others.

Mark 5:21-43 relates two stories about Jesus extending wholeness and blessing to individuals who society may have marginalized due to them being out of reach of such restoration. Jairus, on behalf of his daughter, and the woman suffering from blood hemorrhaging, displayed faith that God heals. These individuals claimed Jesus’ time. Jairus would have lived a marginalized existence had he not come to Jesus believing that Jesus was able to heal and restore his sick daughter. The ailing woman with the issue of blood hemorrhaging would have continued living a marginalized existence had she not believed in Jesus, pursued him in the crowd, and touched his garment.³

²Bryan Loritts, ed., *Letters To A Birmingham Jail: A Response To The Words And Dreams Of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Publishers, 2014), 67.

³In the two paragraphs of textual analysis above, I have benefited from the thinking of Mark McEntire, Wyndy Corbin Reuschling, Anna George Traynham, Zaida Maldonado Perez,

We should not make any ethnic centrism like Afrocentrism, Arabcentrism Asiancentrism, Latincentrism, or Whitecentrism an absolute. Bryan Loritts cites John Piper in this regard, “If the church focuses on efforts toward racial diversity and justice and harmony where God is not central, and Christ is not exalted, and the Bible is not believed, and the gospel is not cherished, the inevitable result will be what we have seen for the last fifty years—the marginalization of God, the centralization of noble slogans, and the loss of power to change human hearts and institutions they create.”⁴ Claim Jesus’ time, the good news of the gospel and transformation, not your ethnicity and the ethnocentrism of its faith journey.

Do not make the fruit of the gospel the gospel. When that happens the power of the gospel is lost and cannot produce fruit. Touch Jesus and be touched by him. Amen.

This sermon was preached (In-Person with COVID-19 protocols and Livestream due to the Coronavirus) on Sunday, 27 June 2021 by the Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh in the Sanctuary at Geneva Presbyterian Church in Laguna Woods, California

Copyright © 2021
Steven M. Marsh
All rights reserved.

William Yoo, Matthew L. Skinner and Richard W. Voelz in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year B, Volume 3* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2020), 108-111, 111-112, 113-116, 117-119, 119-121, 122-124 and 124-126.

⁴Bryan Loritts, ed., *Letters To A Birmingham Jail: A Response To The Words And Dreams Of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 71.