

Series: Words & Deeds Matter Part 2: “Really! They Are Life Changing”
“From What Is Urgent and Immediate to Mundane and Mechanical”
Ezekiel 33:7-11
Psalm 119:33-40
Matthew 18:15-20
Romans 13:8-14

Welcome to Homecoming Sunday. Join me in a time of reminiscence. When you think of home, where is it? Is it the place you were born, your current address, or the place you can seek refuge in times of trouble? As Christians, when we look for home, our tradition points to God. God is home. Ponder that last statement. God is home. God is unconditional love, mercy, peace, hope, joy, forgiveness, and grace.

Love is a marker of Christian identity. Yet, the urgent and immediate often does not foster within us the “love” to navigate through the urgent and immediate successfully. Love seems to be mundane and mechanical in the energizing moment of the urgent and the immediate. However, it is through the manner in which we love others in the difficult stuff that others see Jesus. When you think of the great world religions, love is at the core or near the core of each of the religion’s belief system. It is when love is practiced, however, that the religion confirms its value. Take note of Canadian journalist Bronwyn Drainie as she describes the behavior of a woman, an orthodox Jew, at a Jerusalem street market. Drainie writes:

The most heroic single act I heard of during my two years in Jerusalem involved a Haredi woman. At the Mahane Yehuda one day, the Jewish street market just around the corner from my boys’ school, an Arab terrorist drew a knife among the throng of shoppers and managed to stab two young men before fleeing for his life. The crowd of Israelis, incensed, began running after him, a number of them drawing pistols as they ran. The Arab darted across the street, running straight towards a Haredi woman of 40 who was standing at a bus-stop. Her name was Bella Freund. In a [split second] she sized up what was happening. [Bella] stepped directly into the Arab’s path and tripped him so that he fell to the ground, and she threw herself on top of him to protect him. The crowd kicked

her, spat on her, threatened her with their guns, but they could not loosen her hold on the Arab, and she lay there until the police arrived to take him into custody. Later, when the reporters got to her, Bella Freund said: "It was very simple. If you can save a life, you do it." Her hatred of Arabs, her lifelong conditioning never to touch a man who wasn't her husband, all of it was set aside... "I could not see a helpless man killed by a mob, whatever he had done," she said. "That's not the way I was brought up."¹

It is true that if we authentically embrace Jesus and his teachings, we will love. We will choose love.

The texts in Ezekiel 33:7-11, Psalm 119:33-40, Romans 13:8-14 and Matthew 18:15-20 confirm the point that love is mundane and mechanical. Being alive in the Spirit infuses the mundane and mechanical with love to foster community, fellowship, and reconciliation as the measure of success.

In Ezekiel 33:7-11, we learn that loving is more effective than barreling through the urgent and immediate with poor results. Ezekiel 33:10-11 reads, "Now you, Mortal, say to the house of Israel, Thus you have said: 'Our transgressions and our sins weigh upon us, and we waste away because of them; how then can we live?' Say to them, As I live, says the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live; turn back, turn back from your evil way; for why will you die, O house of Israel?" The sentinel asks Israel to remember not its sin, but God's desire for repentance and life. And the same is true for Christians today. Yes, loving not judging is the way to have success. It takes time, but the result is healthier for all concerned.

In Psalm 119:33-40, we learn that loving is more effective than barreling through the urgent and immediate with poor results. Psalm 119: 33, 36, 38, and 40 reads, "Teach me LORD, the way of your statutes, and I will observe to the end... Turn my heart to your decrees, and not

¹Bronwyn Drainie, *My Jerusalem: Secular Adventures in the Holy City* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1994), 220.

to selfish gain... Confirm to your servant your promise, which is for those who fear you... See, I have longed for your precepts; in your righteousness give me life.” These verses call each one of us to be sentinels to one another. As sentinels, we express the eager passionate desire of God’s people for God, for God’s ways, and for God’s Word.² It is difficult to be sentinels to one another and call the church to account without being relentlessly committed to love, discernment, and listening to God’s Word all seemingly mundane and mechanical.

In Romans 13:8-14, we learn that loving is more effective than barreling through the urgent and immediate with poor results. Romans 13:8, 9, 10, and 14 reads, “Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law... ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’... Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law... Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.” It is true, the obligation to love both binds and liberates us. It restructures our allegiances. It is difficult to slow down enough to remember that loving is not mundane and mechanical. Love binds together the broken and liberates the oppressed.

In Matthew 18:15-20, we learn that loving is more effective than barreling through the urgent and immediate with poor results. Matthew 18:15 reads, “If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one.” Yes, the “how” is critical. Are you clothed in love or judgment? It behooves each one of us when we are being a sentinel to another that our efforts involve the cross-carrying and life-losing way of Jesus. Love!

²Adapted from Ron Rienstra in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year A, Volume 3* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 287.

Do we define ourselves by law/commandments or as a new person in Christ? Followers of Jesus should offer loving words and deeds in troubled situations before resorting to words and deeds of judgment. Love is at the core of being human, for we are created in the image of God (*imago Dei*). We should hope that those who linger among the dead would return to the land of the living. Love is the Christian's identity marker. With love being relegated to mundane and mechanical, we must reject the urgent and immediate way of doing things. Words and deeds in the urgent and immediate, not rooted in love, are harmful.³

What does this mean for you today? The urgent and immediate inhibit love. Being sucked into the urgent and immediate leads to being judgmental. When we see love as mundane and mechanical, we must ask for an infusion of love from the Holy Spirit. Love of God and others is not mundane and mechanical when we see it as a builder of community, fellowship, and reconciliation. I hope you yourself in this story:

An 82-year-old hiker was able to use a GPS-tracking device to lead rescue officials to a younger hiker who had been injured near Jones Peak in the hills above Sierra Madre. Bruce Calkins activated his personal location device, used by hikers to alert certain contacts when they are in distress, summoning the Sierra Madre Search and Rescue Team to his location in Bailey Canyon Wilderness Park, according to a release from L.A. County Sheriff Department's Temple Station... Ground crews were deployed and picked up by a Los Angeles County Sheriff's helicopter, which dropped them near the peak. Officials found Calkins with a 29-year-old man who had fallen 30 feet, officials said. The young man said he was in pain and had suffered visible injuries. Calkins, a Pasadena resident, ... stayed by the younger man's side to provide support and comfort, even giving him his own socks when he realized the man lost a shoe during his tumble, according to the rescuers. The 29-year-old was taken by helicopter to nearby hospital and was treated for his injuries, authorities said...⁴

³In the six paragraphs of textual analysis above, I have benefited from the thinking of John W. Wright, Lincoln E. Galloway, Ron Rienstra, Sally A. Brown, Karen Baker-Fletcher, David J. Schlafer, and Raquel St. Clair Lettsome in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year A, Volume 3* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 281-283, 283-285, 286-288, 289-291, 291-293, 294-296, and 296-297.

⁴Taken from the KTLA 5 News website, June 7, 2017.

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Geneva has been a mission partner with Jim Milley and his ministry, Bridges, for ten years.

The good news of the gospel is this: God offers the free gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ. John 3:16 reads, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” The gift of eternal life cannot be earned by your own efforts, works, or good deeds. It’s about grace. Receive these promises of God that are true for you right now:

From the foundation of the earth, God has known your name...

When Adam and Eve were created by God, God saw you...

When the promise was made to Abraham that the Jewish people would be a blessing to all people it included you...

When Jesus was born, he came to fulfill all of God’s promises for you...

When Jesus was baptized, he was baptized for all humanity past, present, and future...and you too...

When Jesus was crucified, buried, and raised from the dead, he did that for all humanity past, present and future...and you too...

When Jesus ascended to heaven, he did that for all humanity past, present and future...and you too...

When Jesus returns the second time, he will do that for all humanity past, present and future...and you too...

It’s all true. However, do you believe it? Let’s pause and respond silently... So be it!

If you have said “yes” for the first time, welcome to the family of God. You are now a brother or sister of Jesus. You too are a follower of Jesus Christ.

Where is home? Let’s all move closer to finding home in God, in and through Jesus Christ. Thus, all we can do, if we need to use a verb, is love. Amen!

*This sermon was preached on Sunday, 10 September 2023
by the Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh at Geneva Presbyterian Church in Laguna Woods, California*

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