

“Manifestation And Destination”

Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10

Psalm 19

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

Luke 4:14-21

The spiritual gifts are useless without the greatest gift to all followers of Jesus, the gift of love. Epiphany is the radical inbreaking of God’s love into human experience in the birth of Jesus. The baptism of Jesus is the radical inbreaking of God’s love into human experience in that Jesus represented every human being past, present, and future. The transfiguration of Jesus is the radical inbreaking of God’s love into human experience when Peter, James, and John saw the glory of the full humanity and deity of God.

The radical inbreaking of God’s love into human experience continues today. Each day, the radical inbreaking of God’s love impacts your life. Those moments of revelation when you realize that God is moving in your life confirms God’s mission in and through you for the sake of others. God is at work in all followers of Jesus. We are in this thing called the Christian life, together. Listen to Henri Nouwen connect the dots regarding our connection to one another:

Living with ... handicapped people, I realize how success-oriented I am. Living with men and women who cannot compete in the worlds of business, industry, sports, or academics but for whom dressing, walking, speaking, eating, drinking, and playing are the main “accomplishments,” is extremely frustrating for me. I may have come to the theoretical insight that being is more important than doing, but when asked to just be with people who can do very little, I realize how far I am from the realization of that insight. ... Some of us might be productive and others not, but we are all called to bear fruit: fruitfulness is a true quality of love.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Henri J.M. Nouwen in Lifesigns. *Christianity Today*, Vol. 35, no. 12.

A life that bears fruit is one where being present with another demonstrates Jesus living his life through you.... the radical inbreaking of God's love is happening through you for the sake of another. It's all about being faithful.

The scribe Ezra, in the book of Nehemiah, points us to the importance of the Law. The Law, the Ten Commandments, restrains evil, convicts of sin, and aids our understanding of God's will. Loving God, loving others, and making disciples is God's will for our lives. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." It is in this space that Paul urges us to see that our lives, in word and deed, demonstrate faithfulness to God. To do the Ten Commandments requires us to trust that God loves us unconditionally. To know that all who profess faith in Jesus Christ, regardless of their differences, are included in the family of God, requires us to trust that God loves all unconditionally. We are all in this together. We are one body connected to one another to advance the kingdom of God.

Jesus states in Luke 4:18, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor." Knowing and embracing Jesus' mission is important. One day, Jesus went to the synagogue. There, he stood up and read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. It was the custom to read the scripture in the synagogue. It was the custom of the people to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath and to hear the Word of God read. It was the custom of the people to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath and be with one another in the presence of God. But Jesus challenged custom with one short sentence, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me." God became personal. Jesus brought good

news to the poor, proclaimed release to the captives, restored sight to the blind, let the oppressed go free and proclaimed the year of the Lord's favor.

Manifestation and destination. God's love marks the beginning of creation and the consummation of the new heaven and earth. God's unconditional love continues to be made manifest and leads us to transformational daily living every day until the new heaven and earth is consummated at the Second Coming of Jesus. The radical inbreaking of God's unconditional love compels Christians to remember, tell, and live the way of Jesus by being just, kind, and humble. *The Confession of 1967* states this about the importance of unity and Jesus' mission,

The life, death, resurrection, and promised coming of Jesus Christ have set the pattern for the church's mission. His life as man involves the church in the common life of *humanity*. His service to *humanity* commits the church to work for every form of human well-being. The church is called to bring all *people* to receive and uphold one another as persons in all relationships of life: in employment, housing, education, leisure, marriage, family, church, and the exercise of political rights...<sup>2</sup>

Humility, kindness, and justice are at the core of the Gospel.

The Church exists in an internet age of easy access to accurate and inaccurate assessments of reality and heightened self-revelation. We discount tradition and the wisdom of those who have gone before us. A return to listen attentively to the Lord and to offer our best work with determination and unswerving faithfulness is needed. When we follow Christ, we are empowered by the Spirit, and we discover joy in our daily living. When we love others, we build community. The work is not easy, but we are sustained because the "the law of the LORD is perfect"<sup>3</sup> in that it is fulfilled in Jesus.

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<sup>2</sup>*Book of Confessions*, The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Part 1 (Louisville, Kentucky: The Office of the General Assembly, 2014), sections 9.32, 43-45 on pages 292-294.

<sup>3</sup>Psalm 19:7

The manifestation and destination of the gospel is demonstrated when followers of Jesus live are Spirit led, spiritual gifts exercised, and the fruit of the Spirit evident. Living the gospel brings good news to the marginalized, the hurting and suffering, the hopeless and despondent, and all people who are seeking a better way to live. Your life matters in the mission of Jesus. Our, yours, and my life is the manifestation of the good news of Jesus so that more people can join the journey of living a better life now as well as inheriting eternal life.<sup>4</sup> Amen!

*This sermon was preached (for the In-Person, Online, and Village TV 6 congregations) on Sunday, 23 January 2022 by the Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh in the Sanctuary at Geneva Presbyterian Church in Laguna Woods, California*

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<sup>4</sup>In preparation of this sermon, I have benefited from the thinking of Glen Bell, Melissa Browning, Khalia J. Williams, Shannon Craigo-Snell, Cynthia A. Jarvis, Warren Carter and Blair R. Monie in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year C, Volume 1* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 192-194, 194-195, 196-198, 199-202, 202-203, 204-206, and 206-207.