

## The Sacramental Life – The Incarnational Tradition

Colossians 3:12-17, I Corinthians 10:31

Today is our Stewardship Sunday, and we give thanks to God for all the ways God has blessed us, all the ways God has provided for us and we come today to commit ourselves to faithfully support our mission and ministry. We have so many ministries and programs and missions we want to support and we depend on your gracious and spirit-led giving to help us accomplish our goals. One thing that will become a major expense for us in the coming year is getting a new roof put on the sanctuary and I'm sure you will be getting updates on this in the months to come. But I came across this story that might be able to help us. It seems there was this pastor who was very preoccupied with how he was going to ask the congregation to come up with the money to repair the roof on their church building. So he was all set to announce it on a given Sunday when he found out the regular organist was sick and they had to bring in a substitute at the last minute. Of course, the substitute wanted to know what he should play. And the pastor quickly gave him a copy of the service and told him: "Here's the hymns, but you'll have to come up with something after I make the announcement for the finances for the roof." So the time came for the pastor to make his plea: "Brothers and sisters, we are in great difficulty, the roof repairs are going to cost us twice as much as we expected and we are going to need 5,000 dollars more. Any of you who can pledge \$100 or more, would you please stand up." Just at that moment, the substitute organist began to play his selection: The Star-Spangled Banner. Glenn, I think I got an idea for your organ recital this afternoon!

We have been on a journey since the first weekend of October looking at 6 different streams of thought that have been part of the Christian faith for hundreds of years. And we have discovered that there are insights from these different traditions that both challenge us and encourage us. Some of us find that our spirits resonate more with one tradition than another, but I think we have found that all of them have value in helping us to deepen our life as a disciple, in helping us grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I hope this series has challenged you to see your faith life from a broader perspective. That there is truth to be found in all of these traditions and by

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gaining insight from each one you find that your faith has more balance. So whether its growing as a disciple through contemplation, living the holy life, being more open to the leading of the Holy Spirit, being one who serves and speaks for justice, or being an ambassador for Christ sharing God’s good news...that all of these streams of Christian thought will allow us to be drawn closer to God and enhance our witness and service in Jesus’ name.

Today’s final stream from the Devotional Classics is called the Sacramental Life. It is being referred to as the Incarnational tradition. When you hear the word incarnation, what do you think of? Of course, you think of God becoming like us. God in the flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. That is the unique and powerful fundamental truth of our faith. God would identify with our human condition by becoming one of us. The incarnation demonstrated to us that God is One we could know personally...because God has met us as a person.

So what does it mean...the sacramental life – the incarnational tradition. Essentially it is saying, I want every aspect of my life, from the mundane to the time of spiritual worship to be an expression of my faith. The times when I am doing the most trivial things to the times when I am in a high moment of worship... that every moment can be part of living for God. So whether I’m washing dishes, cutting the lawn, working on the job, attending a spiritual retreat, or deep in prayer. All of these things are to be seen as part of living out my faith.

I know that seems hard to think of, but what a change in our attitude and our approach to the many different aspects of our lives, when I can see them as part of living my Christian faith. It brings us back to that verse we heard read from I Corinthians: “So whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God!”

It takes us back to what we talked about when A.W. Tozer spoke of the Sacrament of Living. And how we are tempted to compartmentalize our lives into what he called the sacred-secular antithesis. Like there are those parts of our lives that have nothing to do with our faith and then there are the more spiritual activities. Tozer says: “One of the greatest hindrances to eternal peace

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which the Christian encounters is the common habit of dividing our lives into two areas, the sacred and the secular.” He goes on to say: “Paul’s exhortation to do all to the glory of God is more than pious idealism...It opens before us the possibility of making every act of our lives contribute to the glory of God.”

One of the writers for this week’s theme was a Christian from the 17<sup>th</sup> century known as Brother Lawrence. Many people have been challenged and helped by his writing called The Practice of the Presence of God. “In his own life he determined to be an experiment of living every moment in the presence of God.” Here’s how he described it: “I make it my business only to persevere in his holy presence wherein I keep myself by a simple attention and a general fond regard to God, which I refer to as an actual presence of God. Or, to put it another way, an habitual, silent, and secret conversation of the soul with God. “ Now maybe you say that sounds way beyond any measure of my walk with God, or that it sounds too lofty or unrealistic, but it does cause us to ask how can I connect more of my daily life in the realm of experiencing God’s presence.

I think that’s what the apostle Paul was getting at when he wrote to the Colossian church. He encourages them to put off those things that hinder their faith: “rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips”. And then in very practical terms exhorts them to make their faith real in everyday life. Let’s look again at Colossians chapter three at the characteristics of life that we should be striving to live by in order to make our Christian faith a part of our everyday life: “clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. <sup>13</sup> Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. <sup>14</sup> And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity”.

You have to say that Paul was saying that being a follower of Jesus Christ is more than our times of worship, more than our putting money in the offering plate, more than our times of prayer, being a follower of Jesus is seen in our attitudes, in putting on these Christlike virtues. Notice he says “cloth yourself” These things should be seen in us as we go about our daily business. That’s why

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we call it sacramental, incarnational. It is a visible, tangible living out of our faith in our everyday world. That the person I am in Sunday morning worship would be the person I am on Monday at work, and Saturday with friends and family.

And here we are just a few days before Thanksgiving, And yes even those thanksgiving gatherings can become stressful and even contentious. But notice how this passage from Colossians centers all of this thinking about an incarnational faith around a spirit of thanksgiving: “<sup>15</sup> Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.” When I can see that God is the center of my life, all of my life, when I can live life from the perspective of Christ has done for me and allow his peace to rule in my heart, I can not help but live in the spirit of thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving is a natural expression of who we are in Christ. It is a response to the grace and goodness of a great and loving God who cares for us and provides for us. I guess it’s appropriate that our Stewardship weekend is also the weekend before thanksgiving. Because we see a big part of our stewardship as expressing our thanks to God for all of God’s blessings. And when we make our pledges and when we give our offering, we do it as a matter of faith and our trust in God who will provide for us and in so many ways richly blesses us.

This is the incarnational life. Living our lives in such a way that people see Christ living in you. It is letting the “Message of Christ dwell in you richly”. We need that kind of indwelling that makes a difference in our daily life, just as our world needs to see that kind of infusion of God’s love in us. What a difference it would make in our families, in our communities, in our nation, if we would more freely allow the message of Christ to live in us. We become an incarnational message. People seeing the presence of the Lord in you and me.

The great violinist, Pinchas Zuckerman has played the role of teacher and mentor for hundreds of musicians from around the world. In what is called the “Master-Classes”, Zuckerman would listen to young “up and coming” artists, and then critique their style, and offer advice and demonstrate techniques by playing his own violin for the student. One summer at the Aspen Music Festival, after a room full of performers had played and Zuckerman had given his

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critiques, one final student played for this great teacher. After hearing him play, this student's brilliance was unquestionable. When the young performer had finished playing, the Master Violinist stood to give his response. He picked up his instrument, and after a long pause, placed it under his chin, and then after an even longer pause, Zukerman slowly and carefully brought his violin down and placed it in its case, without playing a single note. It was the greatest compliment this master could give to this student. This student had replicated the master's sound.

You know, the way we live can make all kinds of sounds and sends all kinds of message to the world around us. But as a follower of Jesus, the most effective sounds and messages are those that replicate the message and spirit of the Master. Where by our words, our attitudes, our actions, and the living of our everyday life, the spirit of Christ is incarnated in us.

What a wonderful conclusion to this thought is offered by the apostle Paul in this passage: "And whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." "Whatsoever you do..." It's living a sacramental life. It's letting Christ be seen in all of our life. And maybe that's why this tradition is a good summary of all of the rest of them, for it reminds us that whatever expression of faith that speaks to our hearts, whether it's contemplative or charismatic, inward holiness, evangelical or social justice, it's all about giving glory to God in our everyday life. Every part of your life to the glory of God. So let the message of Christ dwell in you richly...and be thankful!