

NORTHERN LIGHT

Digest

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My I Be Of Service?

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These three live in relationship with one another—a relationship that has been, and continues to be a happy and peaceful one. The Bible tells us God is love, and that love (out-going concern for others) describes the heart of the Creator.

Further, it reveals that the Father, Son and Spirit live harmoniously, with no sense of competition, power plays, manipulation or other negative, selfish traits tainting their relationship.

The New Testament tells us that the Spirit points us to the Son, and the Son came to reveal the Father. The Father is the great giver, and pours out the blessings of life on the whole creation, including the indescribable blessing of salvation (John 3:16). Their relationship has been described as a great "gift exchange", in that rather than exploit and take from each other, they model a life of giving, and mutual service.

Jesus lived out this life of love in human form nearly two thousand years ago. He said that "...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:27,28).

This quote is taken from a passage in which Jesus was approached with a request by the mother of James and John that her son's be given the two "top" spots next to Jesus in his kingdom. Witnessing the group's reaction, Jesus realized they all needed to be taught the proper perspective on such issues, lest the competition and power seeking so endemic to human nature consume the whole group of disciples.

What he said turned the popular viewpoint on its ear, and pointed out that in the Kingdom of God, the key to leadership isn't the possession of power to command the service of others, but consists of a heart to reach out and bless others with service.



Talk about counter cultural!

Yet, to understand God's mind is to come to terms with such core issues. Love is stronger than hate, service is greater than vain power seeking. This is the life that Father, Son and Spirit have been living from eternity, and is the life we are invited through Jesus and by the Spirit to participate in today.

In fact, the Apostle Paul tells us that our attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. As we are now united with Christ, we are empowered to begin to live out a life founded on humility and

service, with an equal interest for the welfare of others as we naturally have for our own (Philippians 2:1-4).

How this will “flesh out” in each persons life will vary, depending on each ones gifts, passions, circumstances etc. However, the common thread is that what is seen expressed is the heart of God—the life of Christ—in a human being reconciled back to him. In such a life we are seeing an expression of how life in the Kingdom of God is meant to look.

Paul goes on in this passage to cite the example of Christ, who though he was God, he released the life he knew and became a human being as we are, with all our many limitations. Further, as a human being he humbled himself by laying his own life down to atone for our sins, so we could now be reconciled back to God. For this reason, Jesus, our great servant, is named our great Lord (Philippians 2:5-11).

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That is how we were meant to live. Indeed, that is how best to live!

Gary Moore

Wanted: “ A Clean And Well-lit Place”

“Sometimes you wanna’ go Where everybody knows your name, And they’re always glad you came...”

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Some Christian teachers I know wonder why it is that the popular culture often steals the Gospel agenda. It’s fairly common, actually. Think of such phrases as “long long ago and far far away” (Star Wars) or “a soft shoulder in a hard world” (AT&T), or the golden oldie “You deserve a break today” (McDonalds) or All State Insurance “The Good Hands People”—that last I used to apply to the caregivers in one of my Toronto churches years ago.

Now, by mentioning the theme from “Cheers” I’m not recommending alcohol as a cure-all. I’m just introducing Jesus’ vision of the church as the Light of the World (Matthew 5:14) from a different perspective. But, incidentally, was not Jesus himself accused of being a friend of the drinking set, “a friend of sinners,” of wine-bibbers and gluttons? Remember? Pastors sometimes wonder if the reason Jesus hung out with sinners is because perhaps they were more fun after all than the uptight righteous, or those who thought they were righteous. He shocked people when he said: “I came not to call the righteous but sinners” (Matthew 9:13).

Which brings me to my point...finally.

A Kinder, Gentler Hemingway

On a cold rainy night in Pasadena not so long ago my wife, Susan, and I took shelter at our favorite eatery in that area—a place noted for good corned beef, lamb shanks and white tablecloths. That particular bitter night followed a movie we saw about some high-class café people in 1930s Shanghai. In the blustery weather the restaurant appeared particularly inviting.

The frigid weather beating away outside made me think of the “White Café” in the movie we had just seen. I thought also of Rick’s “Café Americana” in the movie “Casablanca”—a little outpost of rest and neutrality and conviviality in the darkening 1930s.

I shared my flashbacks with my wife and told her of an Ernest Hemingway short story that always stuck with me. It was titled “A Clean and Well Lighted Place.” It’s about an old man who comes to this nice Spanish restaurant and orders the same thing every night. He comes just before closing. The young server is impatient and wants to go home but the older proprietor is more compassionate—“No, serve him, He’s an old man. Maybe he just needs a clean and well-lighted place to go to. Who knows what trouble he’s seen.”

Here was Hemingway using a nice warmly-lit retreat during the night as a metaphor for a place of rest and refreshment in the midst of a terrible century. Surprisingly, Hemingway has been called an “old softie” by some and this story plays to that interpretation.



It struck me as a good mental image of what the church should try to be. As we round the corner into 2014, a lot of people in this dark, dank world seem to be looking for a clean and well-lit place, a place to hang their hat, to find some cheer against the physical and spiritual storm outside, what Winston Churchill called “our stormy times.”

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Invited to the Banquet

Someone said this decade is turning out so bad that maybe we get to do it over again. Let's hope that's not true. From Tsunamis to terror, from nuclear failures to hurricanes, from “news and weather” on television to “the weather is the news”—we've seen too much bad news already. Enough, already. We need, the world needs, a clean and well-lit place. My prayer is that the Church can be just that in the next year—“where everybody knows your name/ and they're always glad you came.”

A clean and well-lit place. In his thoughtful meditation given to air force pilots serving dangerously during the darkest days of World War Two, *The Weight of Glory*, the great Christian thinker, C.S. Lewis expressed his concept of heaven as a place where we would be welcomed, where we would be well-received and where'd be given a top spot at the Master's table. In one place in the Bible Jesus pictured himself as acting as Host at a fabulous banquet (Luke 12:37). He often compared the Kingdom of Heaven to a grand dinner invitation (Matthew 22:1), a great party. At the end of the Bible, the culmination of God's work with us and in us is seen as the Wedding Supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:9).

That's some party! It's one you won't want to miss and the symbolism draws upon the rich tradition of respect and hospitality that is so evident in the Middle East and its gleeful associations with eating and rejoicing.

In another context, Jesus uses the parable of him knocking at the door of our conscience asking that we will let him in so he can share a meal with us. That's in Revelation 3:20-21. “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me.”

Salt and Light, Incorporated

It's no secret that the Christian church always has a job on its hands trying to get the balance between rejecting the values of the world (1 John 2:15-17), and showing God's love to the world—John 3:16 in tension with James 4:4 and all that. It isn't easy.

So how about this as a balanced word picture? How about thinking of our church home as a clean and well-lit place, a beacon, a place where sinners can come and not feel condemned? It's an uphill

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So how about this as a balanced word picture? How about thinking of our church home as a clean and well-lit place, a beacon, a place where sinners can come and not feel condemned? It's an uphill struggle. Every pastor knows what it's like to encourage his people to walk the line between being the Light of the World and not being overcome by the world.

Ultimately we'll be judged on how many prisoners we visited, how many sick we looked in on, how many strangers we welcomed, how many people we helped (Matthew 25:41-46).

That's a bit scary in a way but it is a stark reminder of what we are supposed to be all about as God's people. John Stott defined evangelism as one beggar telling another where he found bread. Seems like a pretty good motto for 2014.

Neil Earle

struggle. Every pastor knows what it's like to encourage his people to walk the line between being the Light of the World and not being overcome by the world.

One principle that helps us keep the balance is having a heart for the lost, as Jesus clearly exemplified (Luke 16:10). We are to be inviting, open approachable people, welcoming people into our circle of concern, not inviting people to "the church" as such but inviting them to a miniature, imperfect reflection of the Kingdom on earth, a clean and well-lit place where they can find rest for their souls (Matthew 9:35).

That's a tall order, because many times we'd rather condemn the world than reach out to it. It's easier to blast Hollywood or whatever but it's always easier to criticize than to create a superior alternative—a clean and well-lit place.

Leaving a Legacy Gift

Over the years our church has benefited from the regular donations of our membership. Weekly offerings collected at church services have enabled us to support the various ministries in local congregations along with national and international initiatives.

Another way individuals have supported our denomination is through leaving a Legacy Gift. Such Legacy Gifts are an important way in ensuring a lasting gift to Grace Communion International Canada through estate planning.

There are several ways to leave such a gift:

Bequest through a will

There are several forms of planned gifts, but they are usually gifts that are pledged through an individual's will.

A gift of stocks

This can also be made through ones will.

A gift of life insurance

This allows one to make a significant contribution to the church for a relatively small payment.

If you should choose to make a legacy gift, your financial advisor, along with discussions with your family, can help you determine the best options available to you.

Legacy donations that are directed to Grace Communion International Canada will benefit the work of the Canadian denomination, while donations directed to local congregation (Grace Communion International Canada with the name of the local congregation, or city location) will be credited for the use of the local congregation.

(Grace Communion International Canada still holds the registration, Worldwide Church of God Canada and any previous Legacy gifts using that name will still be credited to our church)
