

A Sermon for DaySpring

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“DaySpring over Decaf”

Ephesians 3: 1-13

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I often say to students that most of us preachers are only preaching one sermon. There's some theme in our life...

something stuck in our head...

some idea that gets the heart pumping...

And usually we're working on that in our lives and working it out in the pulpit.

It's often true about authors... writers... I heard someone once say that Henri Nouwen wrote the same book 32 times... He had a theme... something that was his to say... **“You're beloved of God.”** And he just kept saying it and saying, wanting us and his own deeper self to know it.

I think the biblical writers are sort of like that. They each have something that's down in their spiritual gut that they must express. They all tell us something about the Divine and our relationship with it... but each has something in particular they're trying to say... a certain spin.

Read John and you'll get a lot of stuff that sounds very cosmic. He's got a sermon he's preaching and it's that there is something huge and ultimate... a Great Reality that becomes reality. Truth that becomes a person. Love that gets skin.

Read Peter... read Matthew... it's something different.

Read Paul and more often than not he's going to get around to talking about how everyone is in now... the grace of God is for all and it's on the house... a gift. Knowing Paul's story... it's not surprising that God chose him to deliver the news that it's not about what you do and it's not about your race. That the God of Israel and the relationship to Him are available to everyone... not just the Jews. That's Paul's life and his sermon.

You can have a relationship to God...

And it isn't contingent on the law... and your perfect morality...

Or on religious custom and ritual...

Or on what teacher taught you or baptized you...

It's simply about you opening your life to God's grace and saying yes to God's invitation. That's what Paul says over and over and what he's been called to proclaim with and through his life.

In our text, he reminds those in Ephesus, whom he'd never met. **“I'm sure you've heard about me... the special gift that God gave me for your sakes... How I received a special revelation... a peak into the Mystery of all mysteries... that everyone is heir to a relationship to God.”**

It's the Mystery of Christ made known... in a specific way... to Paul. He was walking along a road one day and the Reality of Christ appeared to him... confronted and called him... to carry the name of Christ to the Gentiles.

It was a unique time and he was a unique person, with a unique ministry...

a particular part to play...

a certain expression of God.

And while we affirm the unique roll Paul plays in redemptive history... helping us to understand the Incarnation... we also say what is true in Paul's life is true in our lives and our life together.

God does Epiphany and epiphanies... Big Disclosure and infinite disclosures.

It is the very nature of God to be manifested... here and there in everything God creates... It is in the nature of God to be Incarnate. God finds a kind of Divine fulfillment in this. What else would Love, ultimate Love do, but be expressed? Love unexpressed isn't Love.

So it gets expressed... made known in wonderfully, beautiful, particular ways. There's an Ostrich... and a Yorkshire Terrier... and a Bull Frog...

There's a sunset... a rain shower (or so I've heard)

Delicate flower... majestic mountain.

There's grand providential history... The Great Awakening...

And little playful moments of intervention... a healing conversation with your spouse.

There's John, Matthew... Paul...

There's You and Me, there's DaySpring, all epiphanies of God.

Unique persons... With unique ministries...

Particular parts to play...

Certain, unrepeatable, expressions of God.

That's who we are and who we are together. Now to be sure... also part of the Church Universal... as Paul says it, **"In Christ, the whole building is joined together, rising to become the Lord's Holy Temple."** The place where God dwells... the place where, he says, **"the manifold wisdom of God resides and is proclaimed."** We're all doing that... but each church in some unique way.

It was true for Paul and the Ephesians back in the first century and 2000 years later it's true for this small church gathered here at 7900 Renewal way. And I want to talk some about that today and for the next few Sundays. It's important every now and then to say it out loud in here.

Who are we? What's our sermon? What do we teach? How do we minister? What are we? What is our collective proclamation?

I get asked that, usually over coffee at Starbucks by folks considering us for their church home. They order, "I'll have a Grande-mocha latte-with skim milk and room for cream." I'm always intimidated and just say, "Small decaf." The person taking my order responds, "Don't you mean tall?" and then rolls his eyes. I respond, "I guess.".... Then we sit down and here's what I tell them... four words if you're taking notes.

I

I tell them that we're **confessional**. We are a community that confesses The Faith. There is this core that we're comfortable with... a truth revealed that we rest in. A confession that is the heart of the Christian faith.

We confess with the first Christians that Christ is Lord and Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah.

We confess with Paul that God was in Christ reconciling himself to the world. We confess with the Church Fathers that Christ was God in the flesh... Two natures... fully human, fully Divine.

And we confess with them that the Spirit of this Creator and Redeemer God is alive in us. We believe in the Trinity... that's the heart of the Christian faith and we rest in that.

This is a pretty open-minded place... we're a pretty reflective lot... but we are first a community of confession.

This is a church where you can bring your doubts and your questions and ask them... we aren't anxious at all about that. You can bring your unbelief right along with your belief.

But... when we come here we begin with and end with faith.

On any given Sunday anyone of us might be struggling to have faith... We might be really wrestling with what we've been taught... or where God is... but still... when we gather... when we teach... when we sing... when we preach, we declare The Faith Once Delivered. The basics of the faith aren't up for grabs.

But nor are they turned into doctrinal clubs to beat someone over the head with... There is a non-anxiousness in our confession... and a desire to live it, to be it, not so much to argue over it.

We calmly confess the core of the Christian faith together. We say the Nicene Creed together from time to time... that's the core... the Trinity... God is Father, Son, and Spirit... orthodox faith.

But ours is a "generous orthodoxy" (McClarren's new title)

We rest in the core... say the Creed... but do notice that the Creed doesn't tell you what to think of this war we're in. It doesn't tell you anything about how to interpret scripture. It doesn't say whether or not we ought to sing choruses or hymns in worship.

It doesn't tell you whether or not Christians should oppose capital punishment... or what language to use when speaking of God.

or to support private or public schools...

or what to think about people from other religions...

or whether or not to smoke or drink or dance or chew,

or believe in evolution as you do.

There is the core that we confess and trust in, and then there is a whole lot of room for a whole lot of us who are trying to live out that confession.

And let me tell you folks... this is a diverse congregation, has been from the start-Republicans/Democrats, Liberals/Conservatives, Public Schools/Private Schools, Old Country Baptist/High Church Presbyterian... but one who gathers in all of that diversity and says, with out stuttering... **"God came among us, born of a virgin, lived, taught, gave his life and was raised up..."** and in that, we trust.

II

After I tell them that, I take a sip of my tall decaf, which is still really hot, and see what they think. Then... after we've talked about being confessional, I tell them that we're Baptist.

Some are a little shocked... **"Really!!!"** I often get the question after worship in the Narthex from visitors, **"Now is this a Baptist church?"** And the tone is "Yeah, c'mon... be honest."

"Yes," I tell them... **"we are."**

Not only are we affiliated for missions with the Baptist of Texas and with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship nationally... but also we are in line with the Baptist tradition in some very fundamental ways... four which come to mind.

1. We believe in the centrality of Scripture. The Bible is a big deal to us... we have to deal with it... We don't ever discount it. We read it... study it... engage it... and that's foundational to being Baptist.

2. We practice believer's immersion – When people make a commitment of faith to Christ we all go outside and we gather round the cow trough... and we say the Nicene Creed together and we ask the person if they are a follower of Jesus and then we take them back and we put them under... and they come back up (usually shivering).

We participate in a reality through Baptism by immersion and that's foundational to being Baptist.

3. We practice local church autonomy – For all of our attention to the Tradition and all of our submission to the larger community. At the end of the day, we as a body of believers are discerning together how it is that we should do church in this day and age. That's foundational to being Baptist.

4. Last, we uphold the priesthood of the believers – An often misapplied doctrine that leads some to say... **“I do what I want... believe what I want... say what I want.”** That's not priesthood, that's called selfishness, immaturity, and arrogance.

The notion of priesthood has been tweaked in two ways by Baptist... One is that, I have a personal relationship to God, myself... Christ is my mediator. True enough but if that leads you to say, **“I don't need the Church or anybody else,** it would make our Baptist forebears roll over... wherever they are.

The other understanding is that together, we are, the church is, a royal priesthood. It has more to do with our responsibility to one another and to the world than it does with our individual rights.

So, we practice priesthood here and everyone gets invited to clean the toilets... mow the grass... to serve the hungry and the bread and wine... to buy paper goods and to baptize. We're priest to and with each other. It's part of what makes us Baptist.

III

So... decaf getting cool enough to gulp... I tell them we're confessional... we're Baptist... and that we're contemplative.

Says so... right there on the website. Some of you are thinking... asking from time to time... **“Am I really a contemplative? I've never worn a robe... shaved my head... handed out flowers at the airport. Never had a vision.”**

Maybe you aren't contemplative by nature... but we are as a church and here's why.

(1) Because of the way we worship – There are some things we do that are practices that are from the contemplative tradition. Silence... Lectio Divina... Singing that is focusing in its simplicity, chant-like... ringing bells.

So, there are the practices themselves... but more importantly an intention to aim worship at the heart... and you'll need to come to Sunday School in two weeks to hear about what that means.

(2) We're contemplative because of worship and because of the way we structure our church.

We do not believe that church busyness is transformative. And we believe people need to encounter God deeply, not just maintain the church... so, we keep things as simple as possible that they might be sacred and not mimic the secular driven-ness of our culture.

“Come away with me to a quiet place and rest for a while.”

(3) We're also contemplative because of what we teach – And there will be more on this next week... but for now, DaySpring is contemplative because we talk about transformation of the heart and how that happens.

IV

Now... back to Starbucks and my conversation with the seeker... Usually, after we've talked about the contemplative and I've convinced them I'm neither new age or a Buddhist... the other thing that will always come up... besides being confessional and being Baptist and being contemplative... besides those things, we'll always get around to talking about community and the nature of that here at DaySpring.

And I'm always a little nervous when this subject comes up... what church doesn't want to think of itself as friendly and loving and a place where folks feel welcomed. Where you belong, *"and everybody knows your name."*

I hope that happens in every church...

I hope that happens here...

It's important to us and we work at it.

And we've found through the years that in a church our size the intimacy within the community changed things... Worship was changed because we knew one another. The openness to one another created an openness to the Spirit... at least, I think it did. The place became porous because people came in here not hiding who they were.

If they were broken... they cried, and there was a lot of that.

If they were filled with joy... they sang and laughed...

If they couldn't believe...

they just listened and let us believe for them.

We knew each other... and that changed what happened when we opened the hymnal or read scripture... certainly when "we" preached.

But I am nervous about injecting this into the Starbucks talk... much as I love how we love. I'm nervous in part because **"authentic community"** is such a buzz phrase and I hate trendiness in the Church.

But mostly, I'm nervous because no community is perfect... only God is. And no church can meet all your relational needs. And every church will at some time let you down.

And while I want us to take seriously our needs for community I want even more for us to transcend those needs. Only God can quench your deepest thirst for belonging.

My hope is this-that as we practice love... we become love... and as we become love... we stop thinking about "our needs." DaySpring is a place to practice Christ-likeness

We practice forgiveness and we become forgiving.

We practice acceptance and we stop judging all together.

We act compassionate... then we are.

This is a lab for faith more than it is a fraternity and sorority house or Cheers... It's the place where we do the work of love that we might become love.

And when that happens, it won't even cross our minds that not everyone knows our name... or that someone offended us. We won't even notice that someone is irritating. We'll never ask, **"What have they done for me lately."**

We do have to be careful... but still, over coffee, I affirm that this is a church that works to be a community and a community that blesses and challenges and loves one another.

So, I've finished my decaf... and I've talked about being calmly confessional and historically Baptist and quietly contemplative and a real community... and then I say something like, **"if you'd like to be a part of that just grab me by the elbow some Sunday morning and I'll let the folks know about your decision of faith."**

And some do and you don't know this but when they do-angels start singing "Just as I Am" in the background... Some do...grab the elbow... and some don't... because this place isn't for everyone and that's okay. We are... DaySpring is... a part of a larger building that God is raising up as a holy temple... we're only one room (maybe more like a closet... a little broom closet) but we believe that we've been brought together and graced to be a certain way for this time and place and for the Kingdom's sake and for that we say, **"thanks be to God."**