

Sermon: Erase, Erase, Erase

Scripture: John 3:1-17

Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans

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Thank you Richard for sharing the word this today. I know there are many who say that they see Jesus as simply a great teacher and a moral example and don't go in for the whole divinity thing. But it makes me wonder if they've actually read what Jesus says and how people react - his teachings can be terribly esoteric, his parables seriously baffling, and many of his actions downright mystifying. They add up in my estimation at best to an enigmatic teacher more than a great teacher, for he is continually leaving the people around him scratching their heads if not pulling their hair out with all he says.

Take Nicodemus that Richard just read about in the Gospel of John. He is so eager to be taught and enlightened by this great Jesus but is also hyper-aware of how his own people are distrusting him and feeling threatened by him so he come to Jesus by night and Jesus' words seem to just make things murkier for him. Typical Jesus! God is not arrived at by accumulating spiritual knowledge Nicodemus, nor gaining wisdom, nor even acting correctly, Jesus seems to say to him, but the Kingdom is arrived at by a starting over and being arrived upon. And Nicodemus is like... "whaaaaat?"

Augusta Claire, our youngest daughter, who is going to be a Junior in college next year which is hard to fathom, used to have this phrase when she was a little girl that she would use when something happened that she didn't like and she would say "erase, erase, erase!" Like she would blurt out "I hate my sister!" and we would say "you what?" and she would say "erase, erase, erase... I don't

like when she does that.” Or if someone got the point or punchline of a story before she could tell it in full she would say “erase, erase, erase” and then tell it herself.

This, I imagine, is something of what Jesus is saying to Nicodemus, the learned Jewish scholar and Pharisee. “Much of what you know... erase, erase erase! Start again, back to the beginning.”

And you can imagine it’s particularly hard for someone who had accumulated a lot of knowledge and whose sense of self and reputation was based upon the breadth of his knowledge and the depth of his faith and the goodness of his actions, to hear Jesus say “actually, scrap that, let’s start over.” It would have been easier for someone with much less, with a troubled life and in a mess to hear and receive the message “erase, erase, erase, let’s start over”... which is why they – the down and out folks - are the ones surrounding and following Jesus and its the up and in folks, the righteous ones, who are those threatened by Jesus and want nothing to do with him.

But what Jesus teaches and exemplifies and goes to the cross proclaiming is that you don’t acquire or earn the kingdom of God, you merely receive it as a free gift of grace and in fact it’s those who feel like their exemplary lives, bright minds, profound contributions commend them to the kingdom of God who are most far and removed from it.

This teaching is splattered all over the Gospels – remember, it’s harder for the rich to enter the kingdom of God than for a camel to get through the eye of a needle. Be that rich in finances, rich in spiritual depth, rich in brilliance, rich in good works, they’re all camels. Or take the prodigal son and his brother and who wins in that story? Not the responsible one. Or the laborers who comes at the

11th hour and who gets the reward? The least, the lazy, the last. They wanted something for nothing and they got it! Now who thinks Jesus is a great teacher? Might be easier to accept Him as the Almighty God Himself!

And after 2000 years of Christianity in the West and the building of what some call a Christian nation, it is no less counter-cultural now than it was then. We've been nursed and weaned and raised on the notion that the way to fullness of life and happiness is by way of accumulation of things and money and knowledge and skill and rewards and awards and recognition and accomplishment. Nevermind that those things rarely actually deliver on the joy and satisfaction that they promise, we have bought it hook line and sinker and kneel in utter subjection to such accumulations. And yet the great teacher and example Jesus says "erase, erase, erase, all that, it's more about relinquishment than it is about accumulation. The Kingdom of God is not an add on to what you already have, it's not an add on to the end of a life that was lived correctly so that when you die you achieve heaven, nor is it an add on to all your knowledge that finally grants you the parting of clouds and sun-shining radiant enlightenment, the Kingdom of God is a wiping clean and a do over, being born again to see the world afresh without all the accumulations, it's about receiving what is given and not accumulating it but allowing it flow right back out of your life.

Which believe it or not is where the doctrine of the Trinity makes it's appearance. We Christians say that God is a 3 in 1 reality – I know it sounds like a discount at Target but it's a little more important than that. To say that God is not just one but 3 in 1 is to say that the very nature of God is relational, not static but relational which is to say God is love. God is a love relationship going on between Father-Son-Holy Spirit, Mother-Daughter-Holy Ghost, Parent-Child-Love-

Between and creation is drawn up into that relationship of love and of course since we are part of creation, we are drawn up there too. "God so love the world that he GAVE his only begotten son so that any who belove in him (because belove is more accurate instead of believe which we have come to see as a mental activity) any who belove in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

To perish you see is to stop up the flow while eternal life is about an ever-flowing movement of God. It's about the flow of that love that is in the relational God. The blocking of that flow is what we call sin, which is when we grab hold and try to capture and accumulate what is meant to be a constant state of giving and receiving... which is why the Holy Holy Holy God at times needs to do an erase, erase, erase job on us so that we are born again, made new, and can enter afresh into the dynamic that is the Trinity of God forever and ever and ever, Amen!

Go forth in the strength of God

The peace of Christ

And the blessing of the Holy Spirit.

Go in peace!