

CONQUERING THE WORLD BY OUR FAITH 6 Easter B

The letter of John makes some bold statements in the second lesson of Holy Scripture that could be viewed as not politically correct today. Statements such as “the one born of God conquers the world” suggest that there is a war going on in each of us. What war might he be writing about in his letter? The letter goes on to write, “Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” Whether politically correct or not the writer called John strikes a nerve. He makes it personal and writes that Jesus is the Son of God and without that belief the world conquers the non-believer.

Conquering the world today is an uphill battle if you stand your ground and say what your heart knows to be true but it’s not acceptable to society. Did you know that Christians in the first century were called cannibals? They ate the body of Christ and drank His blood. They were accused of incest because they called one another brothers and sisters and they loved each other. The world misunderstood them. The world hated Christians because they would not worship the gods of those in power. Is it any different today? Does not the world hate Christians for daring to love God by their obedience to His commandments?

A friend and fellow seminarian called me to discuss his preaching at a Unitarian Universalist Church on Easter Sunday of this year. He was given some boundaries as to what he could preach. He could not mention God or Christ. I personally would have felt those terms as a reproach on my freedom as he did. However, this friend does supply work and he sees such an invitation as a challenge.

Unitarians are a merger of two groups that are known to have in their membership every religious group one can think of including Buddhists, atheists, pagans and some say, even Christians. There is no confession of faith as our scripture dictates to us today. At the end of the service a woman came to Bill and told him she wanted to give her life to God. Bill asked her how that could be when he had not said a word about God. She replied, “We know when someone is talking about God; when we feel God within that person.” Bill asked the woman to turn to the people and tell them what she had just said and she did. I thought that was a complement to Bill for a non-believer to say she discerned God within him. I believe that Christ bore witness to that woman within Bill’s heart and words. God’s grace is amazing!

John’s letter further writes about faith that overcomes the world. If we believe Christ and everything he taught then obedience will follow. In John’s letter love of God and obedience are a pair. One can talk about love of God and the love of Jesus Christ on the cross, but it is only love if one obeys Christ’s commands.

A 'command' seems a bit out of place – 'gauche' might be a good word for its use for it seems that to command someone is tacky, especially when it comes to love. Nevertheless, God commands our love by obedience, another word that seems ... well ... gauche! Obedience to commandments may be socially awkward and not make sense, until we pass a red light and are caught. Yet now if we are caught passing the red light it is called a failure "to heed" the traffic light. I remember when it was simply called 'obeying traffic signs.' The point is that obeying only becomes important after we are caught.

We live in a world that does not want to obey common decency or respect. The world insists we all "make friends" with its ideas of what is good and right. The voices of the world would command us as well to reinterpret the morality of Holy Scripture. These voices will continue to breathe hate upon the children of God. Yet we have clear teaching on these matters.

Will we obey? "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments" (1 John 5:2). All those who love the children of God and love God will come to know that the command to love by obedience is not burdensome. The world will tell us it is too hard! The world will tell us to be a tax cheat, everyone's doing it! The world will tell us a lot of things and as we listen, the still small voice gets dimmer in our head. As we listen to the world, the front line of defense called conscience ceases to bother us and like a battery that that we neglected to charge, it eventually goes dead.

The command to love by obedience is not a burden, once we make up our minds to hear the wisdom of God's commandments and do them. They were written for our welfare. They were written to guide and recharge our conscience. When we consider all that God has provided in His commands to love by obedience, they are no longer a bother. We are set free. God gave us His commandments that His joy may be in us and be complete. Having tasted that God is good, we will be like the woman who came to my friend Bill, and turn our lives over to God. The old hymn speaks truly:

Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!
 Thou art the Potter, I am the clay.
 Mold me and make me after Thy will
 While I am waiting, yielded and still.

Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!
 Hold o'er my being absolute sway!
 Fill with Thy Spirit 'till all shall see
 Christ only, always, living in me.

May that old hymn be our prayer of surrender to love God and obey His commandments. Amen!