

Dave's Laptop

October 21, 2014

As a follow-up to last week's column, I want to share with you an editorial by Episcopal priest Tom Ehrich in *Baptists Today*. After reading it, you might want to ponder what your own list might look like

"If Christians stopped bickering about church, presenting sex as a first-order concern, telling other people how to lead their lives and lending our name to minor-league politicians, what would we have to say? We need to figure that out, because we are wearing out our welcome as tax-avoiding, sex-obsessed moral scolds and amateur politicians. In fact, I think we are getting tired of ourselves. Who wants to devote life and loyalty to a religion that debates trifles and bullies the outsider?"

"So what would we say and do? No one thing, of course, because we are an extraordinarily diverse assembly of believers. But I think there are a few common words we would say.

ONE: We would say the name "Jesus." We might mean different things by that Name, but He is the center, the reason we exist.

TWO: Allowing ample room for our diversity, we would say what we mean by faith in God. Not how right we are and how wrong others are, but an I-message: "Here's why I believe in God."

THREE: We would tell stories about God's impact on our lives. Not grand doctrines, not airtight theories, not definitions of who's inside the circle and who's outside, but stories of personal encounter with God.

FOUR: We would listen to other stories, respectfully, not defensively, eager to hear what our fellow Christian has to say.

FIVE: We would each tell as honestly as we can how we are trying to lead our lives in the light of our encounters and stories. We would sketch the bridge between faith and action.

SIX: We would tell what we see in the world—not in the woe-is-me, sky-is-falling, Satan-is-winning manner people expect from us—but just what we see and how we think God cares about it.

SEVEN: We would speak of hope, a durable, solid-rock Hope that God is God, and God can use us to make a difference.

EIGHT: We would talk of joy. Not giddiness, not even happiness, as the world understands happiness, but that deeper response to God that feels whole and peaceful.

"Personally, I think these eight things are what we ache to say. They are why we walked in the door or a church in the first place. They are why we stay, despite abundant reasons for leaving.

"Everyone has a theory about 'why people are leaving the church,' 'why millennials don't come to church,' 'why churches are dying,' and 'what's wrong with society.' Personally, I think we should stop worrying about institutional outcomes—especially outcomes that we hope will prove we were right all along—and try instead just to be hopeful, joyful, active people of faith.

“I think we should take our parts in the great political debates—power and wealth, after all, were Jesus’ primary concern—but then agree that, whether X or Y gets elected, God will still grieve our cruelties and sufferings, and we will all have much work to do as believers.

“Whatever the label—progressive or conservative, contemporary or traditional, denominational or nondenominational—we will each have something unique and necessary to contribute. There is more binding us than dividing us. For division comes from our small and selfish places. Binding comes from God.”

Pastor Ehrich’s plan sounds like a pretty good one to me.

Dave



The Joshua Code: Fifty-Two Verses Every Believer Should Know

O.S. Hawkins (Thomas Nelson, 2012)

Week forty: Ultimate Love

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

I was a young pastor, and it was a bitter cold winter afternoon. Snow and ice covered the windswept cemetery as I stood with a young couple at the open grave of their newborn baby. We wept and prayed, I read Scripture, I said a few words of comfort, and we left. I went home that evening and could not get that brokenhearted mother and father out of my mind.

On impulse, I went into our firstborn daughter’s room, picked her up, and sat down in the den. I wondered how I would have felt had I been that other young dad who sat in his home a few blocks away. I came to the conclusion that what would have bothered me most was that she would never have known, in this life, just how much her earthly father loved her and was willing to give himself for her.

And that is the tragic thing about living a life without Christ. Those who do not know Christ can never know how much the Father loves them. Our God demonstrated His love when we were least deserving. No wonder the Bible says, *“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:13).*

THE PROOF OF GOD’S LOVE

The Bible says, *“When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law” (Galatians 4:4).* Jesus was not some sort of remedial action, a last minute splint for a broken world when everything else had failed. The preparation God had done was staggering. He had raised up a Greek nation that took the Greek language across the known world so the gospel could spread without a language barrier. He raised up a Roman empire that built a road system of fifty thousand miles across the world so the gospel could move from country to country.

Yes, it was in the “fullness of time” that Christ came (Galatians 4:4), and you are an individual, loved by the Lord. And the love you can voluntarily return to Him is indescribably valuable to Him.

THE PHENOMENON OF GOD’S LOVE

The phenomenal thing about the love of God is that He expressed it to us not when we were perfect or deserving, but “while we were still sinners.” Jesus came and clothed Himself in human flesh. He came to where we are so that one day we could go to where He is. In other words, He came to earth so we could go to heaven. He was forsaken so that we might never be forsaken. As someone said, “The Son of God became the Son of Man in order that the sons of men could become the sons of God.”

THE PRICE OF GOD’S LOVE

As I held my little daughter tightly that night, I thought, *I’d give the world to her if I could.* Then it occurred to me that God had said just the opposite. He had said, “I’ll give My Son to the world.” It isn’t any wonder the songwriter of old said, “Oh, the love that drew salvation’s plan. Oh, the grace that brought it down to man. Oh, the mighty gulf that God did span . . . at Calvary.”