

## Theological Musings from Dave's Laptop

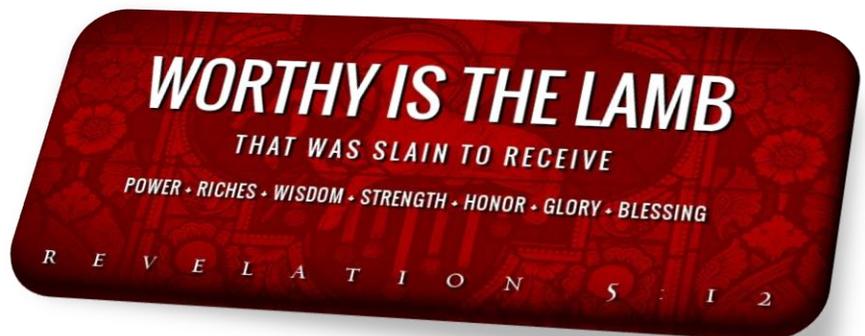
November 1, 2016



I'm sure you know that for the liturgical churches, today is All Saints' Day, that last night was All Hallows' Eve, and that tomorrow is All Souls' Day. As it happened, while I was waiting for Trick or Treaters last night, I was also re-reading the entire *Apocalypse* of John in preparation for giving an overview of "The Book of Revelation in an Hour" on the next two Wednesday nights (beginning next week).

And as I re-read those familiar words, my heart was glad to be reminded that even at this very moment, the angels of heaven, "*numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand,*" encircle the throne of God and loudly proclaim, "**Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!**" (Revelation 5:11-12).

With them are that great, uncountable multitude of saints (believers) "from every nation, tribe, people, and language," and one day, we will join them in their cry: "*Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!*" That's how things are and will be on the Other Side, but until our time comes, we have work to do on This Side.



And on This Side, one of our primary responsibilities is to "love one another. As our Lord told us, "*A new command I give you: **Love one another.** As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another*" (John 13:34-35).



We at CBF rejoice all the time in loving one another. Guests often comment on how happy we are ☺, and that's a Good Thing! At the same time, Jesus also told us that "*This is to my Father's glory, that you **bear much fruit**, showing yourselves to be my disciples*" (John 15:8). And Jesus also gave us many instructions about what that "fruit" looks like. Two of the most familiar ones go like this:

- "*For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. . . .*

*Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me*" (Matthew 25:35-36, 40).

- “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20).

And, while we do tolerably well as a congregation in these areas, too, we always have room to grow, and our world continues to desperately need all of these things. It is in this spirit that I share with you this story from Tony Campolo, who routinely challenges me to deeper faith and commitment . . . .<sup>1</sup>

“I was in Hawaii to speak, and because of jet lag, I couldn’t sleep. In the wee hours of the morning, I found a little place up a side street that was still open. I went in, took a seat on one of the stools at the counter, and waited to be served. This was one of those sleazy places that deserves the name, ‘greasy spoon.’ I did not even touch the menu. I was afraid that if I opened the thing something gruesome would crawl out. But it was the only place I could find.

“The fat guy behind the counter came over and asked me, ‘What d’ya want?’

“I said I wanted a cup of coffee and a donut.

“He poured a cup of coffee, wiped his grimy hand on his smudged apron, and then he grabbed a donut off the shelf behind him. I’m a realist. I know that in the back room of that restaurant, donuts are probably dropped on the floor and kicked around. But when everything is out front where I could see it, I really would have appreciated it if he had used a pair of tongs and placed the donut on some wax paper.

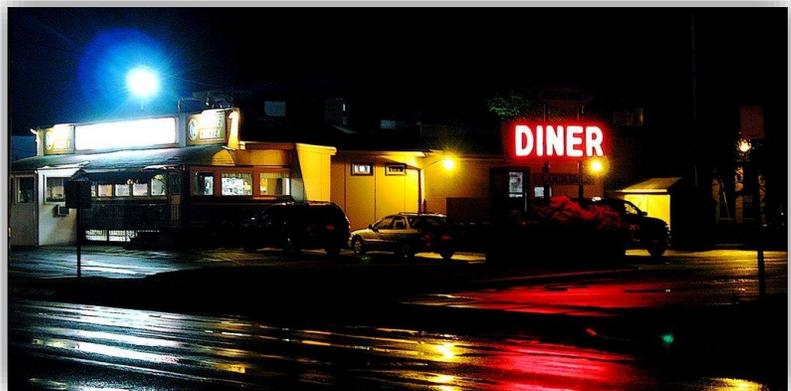
“As I sat there munching on my donut and sipping my coffee at 3:30 in the morning, the door of the diner suddenly swung open and, to my discomfort, in marched eight or nine provocative and boisterous prostitutes.

“It was a small place, and they sat on either side of me. Their talk was loud and crude. I felt completely out of place and was just about to make my getaway when I overheard the woman beside me say, ‘Tomorrow’s my birthday. I’m going to be 39.’

“Her ‘friend’ the proprietor responded in a nasty tone, ‘So what do you want from me? A birthday party? What do you want? Ya want me to get you a cake and sing “Happy Birthday”?’

“ ‘Come on,’ said the woman sitting next to me. ‘Why do you have to be so mean? I was just telling you, that’s all. Why do you have to put me down? I was just telling you it was my birthday. I don’t want anything from you. I mean, why should you give me a birthday party? I’ve never had a birthday party in my whole life. Why should I have one now?’

“When I heard that, I made a decision. I sat and waited until the women had left. Then I called



<sup>1</sup> The story comes from Tony Campolo, *The Kingdom of God is a Party* (Dallas: Word, 1990), pp. 3-9.

over the fat guy behind the counter, and I asked him, ‘Do they come in here every night?’

“ ‘Yeah,’ he answered.

“The one right next to me, does she come here every night?”

“ ‘Yeah,’ he said. ‘That’s Agnes. Yeah, she comes in here every night. Why d’ya wanta know?’

“Because I heard her say that tomorrow is her birthday,” I told him. “What do you say you and I do something about that? What do you think about us throwing a birthday party for her—right here—tomorrow night?”

“A cute smile slowly crossed his chubby cheeks, and he answered with measured delight, ‘That’s great! I like it! That’s a great idea!’ Calling to his wife, who did the cooking in the back room, he shouted, ‘Hey! Come out here! This guy’s got a great idea. Tomorrow’s Agnes’s birthday. This guy wants us to go in with him and throw a birthday party for her—right here—tomorrow night!’

“His wife came out of the back room all bright and smiley. She said, ‘That’s wonderful! You know Agnes is one of those people who is really nice and kind, and nobody does anything nice and kind for her.’

“Look,” I told them, “if it’s okay with you, I’ll get back here tomorrow morning about 2:30 and decorate the place. I’ll even get a birthday cake!”

“ ‘No way,’ said Harry (that was his name). ‘The birthday cake’s my thing. I’ll make the cake.’

“At 2:30 the next morning, I was back at the diner. I had picked up some crepe-paper decorations at the store and had made a sign out of big pieces of cardboard that read, ‘Happy Birthday, Agnes!’ I decorated the diner from one end to the other. I had that diner looking good.

“The woman who did the cooking must have gotten the word out on the street, because by 3:15 every prostitute in Honolulu was in the place. It was wall-to-wall prostitutes—and me!

“At 3:30 on the dot, the door of the diner swung open, and in came Agnes and her friend. I had everybody ready (after all, I was kind of the M.C. of the affair) and when they came in we all screamed, ‘Happy birthday!’



“Never have I seen a person so flabbergasted; so stunned; so shaken. Her mouth fell open. Her legs seemed to buckle a bit. Her friend grabbed her arm to steady her. As she was led to sit on one of the stools along the counter, we all sang ‘Happy Birthday’ to her. As we came to the end of our singing with ‘Happy Birthday, dear Agnes, happy birthday to you!’ her eyes moistened. Then, when the birthday cake with all the candles on it was carried out, she lost it and just openly cried.

“Harry gruffly mumbled, ‘Blow out the candles, Agnes! Come on! Blow out the candles!’ And, after an endless few seconds, he did. Then he handed her a knife and told her, ‘Cut the cake, Agnes. Yo, Agnes, we all want some cake.’

“Agnes looked down at the cake. Then without taking her eyes off it, she slowly and softly said, ‘Look, Harry, is it all right with you if I . . . I mean is it okay if I kind of . . .

what I want to ask you is . . . is it O.K. if I keep the cake a little while? I mean, is it all right if we don't eat it right away?'

"Harry shrugged and answered, 'Sure! It's O.K. If you want to keep the cake, keep the cake. Take it home, if you want to.'

" 'Can I?' she asked. Then, looking at me, she said, 'I live just down the street a couple of doors. I want to take the cake home, okay? I'll be right back. Honest!'

"She got off the stool, picked up the cake, and carrying it like it was the Holy Grail, walked slowly toward the door. As we all just stood there motionless, she left.

"When the door closed, there was a stunned silence in the place. Not knowing what else to do, I broke the silence by saying, 'What do you say we pray?'

"Looking back on it now, it seems more than strange for a sociologist to be leading a prayer meeting with a bunch of prostitutes in a diner in Honolulu at 3:30 in the morning. But then it just felt like the right thing to do. I prayed for Agnes. I prayed for her salvation. I prayed that her life would be changed and that God would be good to her.

"When I finished, Harry leaned over the counter and with a trace of hostility in his voice, he said, 'Hey! You never told me you were a preacher. What kind of church do you belong to?' In one of those moments when just the right words came, I answered, **'I belong to a church that throws birthday parties for whores at 3:30 in the morning.'**

"Harry waited a moment and then almost sneered as he answered, **'No you don't. There's no church like that. If there was, I'd join it. I'd join a church like that!'**

"Wouldn't we all? Wouldn't we all like to join a church that throws birthday parties for whores at 3:30 in the morning? Well, that's the kind of church that Jesus came to create!"

I think that must have been in the fine print under Matthew 25: "**And I want you to throw parties for prostitutes at 3:30 in the morning to show them that I love them.**"

*Wow. I'd join a church like that.*

Dave

