

Theological Musings from Dave's Laptop

June 20, 2017

For starters, please consider these graphics. Ponder them for a moment and try to be aware of what goes on within.



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What did you discover?

Did you feel empathy? Fear? Admiration? Concern? Love? Hate?

We live in an age when the very mention of Islam frequently elicits fear, and often summons hatred. And while it is true that Christians are violently persecuted these days in many Muslim lands, such persecution also exists in Hindu nations, Communist nations, and Buddhist nations. Humans are unfortunately very good at persecution (Christians included).

While I have not known very many Muslims personally, the ones I have known best have all been gracious, hospitable, gentle, hardworking, upstanding folk whom I would be very glad to have for neighbors and was glad to have as friends. And while there is no doubt that we live in a time when Islamic fundamentalists are fomenting hatred and terror around the globe, we need to also remember that most of the millions of Muslims who have become refugees and migrants in the last few years have been fleeing violence and instability in their homelands, just as we ourselves might have done, and as many of our forebears did in fact do.

Despite the nearly daily news of new terrorist attacks—and possibly partly *because* of them—one missiologist has noted that **“This is the best chance we’ve ever had to share the love of Jesus with Muslims. This is a moment Christian missionaries to the Muslim world have dreamed about for centuries.”**

And we don’t have to go very far to find Muslims in need of love and friendship. The Columbia Mall, any city park, and perhaps your own street, provide multiple opportunities for contact and kindness, especially as persecution of Muslims intensifies.

As followers of Jesus, it is of course our desire to introduce our friends, Muslim or otherwise, to Him. Happily, it is in the Muslim world that Isa (Arabic for “Jesus”) most frequently appears in dreams and visions these days, and the Spirit is quite visibly at work.

The bridge across which Jesus nearly always travels is the Bridge of Love. We don’t bring people to Jesus by arguing with them, but by caring about them and by loving them. And in Christian witness, as in most other areas of life, one of the most effective strategies is that of listening. People are healed “by the laying on of ears.”

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Whether our conversation is with Muslims or with anyone else with whom we have differences of opinion and perspective, our first goal should be to understand the other person as best we can. People do what they do and believe what they believe for reasons that seem good and sufficient to them. Take a genuine interest in finding out why people believe what they do.

Someone has pointed out that “**people who have accepted their beliefs rather than having chosen them are more inclined to defend them than to discuss them.**” In that one sentence is the explanation for much of what we observe in the world around us. We may be able to “loosen people’s categories” by encouraging them to talk about their “how’s” and “why’s,” and in the process of making those explicit, they may discover things that increase their interest in Jesus. And they just might “loosen our categories” as well.

One of the critical dimensions of following Jesus that is often lost on us in the West is the communal dimension of personal identity. Much, if not most, of the world is far more “communal” and “tribal” than we are here. If changing your belief means changing your identity, such change comes at the risk of rejection from those primary relationships.

Indeed, for a Muslim to choose to follow Jesus is usually to be treated as dead—and sometimes to be actually killed—by one’s family and friends. This is not to be taken lightly, nor decided in a hurry.

Even so, Muslims, together with us and with all other humans, have two, and only two, central, fundamental, primary, overarching, consuming desires. We hunger for **A Life that Matters**, and we hunger for **Relationships that Last**. *The goal of Love is to help our neighbors and friends discover that personal relationship with God the Father through Jesus the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit is the only way that these yearnings find their complete fulfillment.*

Peter admonished us to “*Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect*” (1 Peter 3:15). Patience, gentleness, and kindness are the materials with which we build the bridges across which Jesus may eventually pass.<sup>1</sup>

Let us build well.

Dave



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<sup>1</sup> You recognize these as three of the nine “fruit of the Spirit” Paul names in Galatians 5:22-23. These character qualities will be the subject of this summer’s sermons.