

Joy for the World - Getting Physical in order to be really Spiritual
Psalm 139:1-18, John 1:43-51, I Corinthians 6:12-20
January 15, 2012

It's all pretty simple, really. As complicated as we sometimes feel life is, as complicated as we sometimes make life for ourselves... With our wonderings and wanderings, with our sins, and our sensation seeking senses...

As complicated and confusing as life sometimes seems, it's all pretty simple, really. God said it.... Simply. Jesus did it... clearly. And we are called to listen, to learn, and to live life simply, according to God's will. We are called to - Love God, and to love one another.

It's simple. But it's not easy, is it? Just to look at the behavior of people, people all over the world - people treating other people in horrific inhuman ways – now in Syria, after Egypt and Libya and still in Somalia and the Sudan, and in Detroit and even in Midland, and this makes it clear that living right isn't simple or easy at all.

Even having clear and simple directions from God, just 10 clear commandments, we find it hard to live right - if the captain of the capsized Italian Cruise Ship found it not simple at all to follow the simple rule – go down with your ship.

Living in the right direction... it isn't easy at all. And we all fall...

And what is a bit frightening is now there are many, many people who simply don't even care. They are called the So what generation.

They say - So what if there is a God or if there isn't Ultimate Good or not – so what. What matters, what only matters, is how I'm doing - am I getting my piece of the pie or – a little more.

And my worry – if we who aim high, aim to live by a divine standard, fall Short and Fail, where will we be when too many people care not all for ultimate good thing at all?

Living good – isn't easy at all – but we are called to do it - And if we don't - if we don't It does seem to matter – doesn't it seem to matter – a lot – in how things go in our World. So - let's talk some more about it this morning – about being Christians, and how it matters - how we live for God in God's world.

Let us pray.

Lord of hope and peace and love and light...and joy.... May the words of my mouth, and the thoughts of these your faithful and loving people, be acceptable in your sight, and your good word to us this day, in Christ. Amen.

“O Lord, you have searched me and known me. Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me.” And Jesus said to Nathaniel - I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you. - Rabbi, you are the Son of God, Nathaniel said.

Do you now know, Paul wrote, that your body is a temple of the holy spirit within you. Therefore glorify God with your body.

The psalmist sang it. God is great and knows all things. Jesus showed it – God knows who we are and where we are. Paul said it, we belong to God. And all of this is - yes – pretty spiritual stuff. That’s God talk. And – you know – what better time or place for us to talk God talk – to get spiritual – than right here and right now – in Church.

But - As William Willimon, former Chaplain at Duke, says... So much of our lives are concerned with physical matters – already today, in rising from sleep, getting dressed, preparing to come here – we were pretty concerned with physical, carnal, bodily matters. – Getting up, deciding what to wear, what to eat for breakfast, even whether to venture out on icy roads... To be here, to be spiritual, we had to get physical.

But now – we’re here – in Church, and we can get spiritual. Enough of the messy stuff of the world – its wars, and its economic worries, its gas prices, Its crime and corruptions, its diseases, and all the ways we die in it. Let’s be spiritual – let’s talk about God. About Love and light and hope and peace – and yes, Joy.

And we do just this. And maybe that’s part of the reason the So What folk are so turned Off by us religious Folk. Because - we keep separating our physical lives, What happens every day out there – from what happens in here. Some how we do kind of keep on trying to be holy here – but then it seems we try less to as holy out there.

But finally we cannot and we should not try to keep these two apart. Because - Because the very word, the Bible, and all its words about God, This word about God is... This spiritual word is always, powerfully physical, this worldly, real life-like....

This word gets down and dirty, it gets very, very human. It keeps calling us to see God most clearly, most fully, not most in quiet contemplations – but in the concrete messy world of our daily lives.

Remember – we just celebrated Christmas. The birth of Jesus Christ. And we call him Immanuel – which means - what? God with us. God with us. God in flesh appearing.

That’s the truth. That’s God keeping God’s great promise to us – that God will be our God – with us. And for all that God is Spirit, the Spirit, the energy, the power, the force behind and over and under and in all of life... God gets physical, in Christ.

And the Apostle Paul, in our Scripture lesson this morning from I Corinthians, Paul insists that to understand God, to know God, to know the Joy God has in mind for us in life...

Paul insists we need to get physical, to talk about physical things. And so - In order to talk most clearly about God - Paul talks about – what? Food. And he talks about sex. Two pretty hot topics in our day ... Food and too much weight. Food and diets. Food and healthy life style. And Sex – who’s doing it with whom. In marriage or maybe not. Or before, and during and after. And we see a world racked by and dying from – AIDS.

Paul talked then about what we are talking about now. Paul wants to talk to us about God. About very spiritual things. And – Paul begins talking most of all about very physical things - food and sex. And Paul tells us why. Paul makes the astounding claim that our bodies, our physical bodies, are – part of Christ's body.

In other words, Paul looks at our physical bodies, our life in the world, as a serious spiritual issue. Because – we are children of God, and more, as followers of Jesus Christ, Paul says we are joined to Christ – we are – in a sense – Him. He is in the world through us – We are Christ's body in the world.

And so – for Paul, everything we do involves Jesus Christ. For he is one with us by the Spirit. And that's why Paul was so serious about food and about sex.... About the physical aspects of our lives.

How we eat – and what we eat, and what we share with others or not... Who we sleep with... these are for Paul, not just simply physical things. They are central to what we believe. If we believe, and if we want the real joy of faith in our lives, then, for example, we will handle food with great care. In a starving world we will not waste – not a crumb. In a starving world we will gorge ourselves, or treat our God given bodies with disdain. We will be fit and so able to faithful in our discipleship, in doing God's good will.

And in a world where the words we use for sex are so often words like – Scoring, and hooking up, and making it, and getting away with it, Doing what feels good.... Paul talks to us about sex as intimacy, as a joining together of what is physical and spiritual, about sex as a union of our two natures as humans, male and female, even as in Jesus Christ, we see the union of divine and human.

Paul says, if we want to get really spiritual, then, like God, in Christ, we've got to get physical. We've got to take the physical aspect of our lives seriously - because - It will be through our physical worldly lives that we will or will not come - through our death and the resurrection of our bodies – home to God.

Did you hear that? Paul is saying – in order to get fully spiritual, one with God, we've got to get physical. It will be through our physical worldly lives, that we will come, or not come, through life, death and resurrection of the body, home to God. In other words, what we do in this life matters forever.

Willimon writes..

Once decay and death have done their worst, we believe that by faith God will raise our bodies, will redeem our bodies, and will put our bodies lovingly back together in eternal perfection. God promises us resurrection.

And all this says that the most spiritual things in life have a clear physical dimension. For example, we Christians have – ought to have – the highest view of the physical, because the body is the temple of the Lord. And so Jesus, fed the hungry, healed the sick, visited and freed the imprisoned. And hospitals and hospices grew out of the commitment of Christian people who cared for the physical aspects of life.

And Jesus and Paul described and prescribed marriage as the setting for the true and good expression of our sexuality. And - he was crucified, dead and buried, and rose - so that we like him, might know the resurrection of the body.

And Jesus called us to be his disciples.. followers of his way. To make very physical our care and kindness and compassion and love for one another.

Willimon asks – What does Paul mean when he says – Glorify God with your body?

How do we do that? It might mean better care of our bodies – healthy life styles that leave us with the energy to do good - And so... good food, good rest, good recreation, and clean life styles – taking the best care we can of the gift we've been given....

Knowing – as we know – in Christ..

That while this body will waste away, will die, the spirit with which we fill this body, that spirit will be seen and known in the new body that will be ours in the Risen Christ in our resurrection with him.

Behold, their deeds will praise them in the gates.... By your fruits you shall be known.... What we do with our bodies counts. We need to get physical in order to be truly spiritual.

And – in all of this, is the deepest kind of joy for us. It's how we find it. The joy of being and doing just what you and I were meant to be and to do.

Martin Luther King, Jr. – whose birthday is today – said it well in these words. *The ultimate measure of a person .. the true neighbor... is when one will risk position, prestige, and even life, for the welfare of others. In dangerous valleys and hazardous pathways, the true neighbor will lift some bruised and beaten person to a higher and more noble life.*

That's Love – getting physical. And that is joy. Joy to the World - Joy for the world. God in flesh appearing. Joy to the world. It's a great carol... and it ought not be just for Christmas. Joy to the world, the Lord is come. Yes. God got physical with us.

Joy for the world. God's own, that's us, making God's love known. The contemporary worship song puts it this way... Don't tell people that God loves them, unless you're ready to love them too.

It is our challenge and our call – but it is also our joy. To help other people, by our show of love for them, to know that God loves them. So what? Someone says. Here's what Yes, for sure, it does, all begin, here. It begins over and over again, here, when we get spiritual. When we worship God in spirit and in truth. And then – yes – we leave - and it all needs to get physical – but in the beginning and the end - its all of the spirit – the spirit of God in Christ at work in us.

My father often quoted these lines that capture all this – the truth that we will know our deepest joy as we are ambassadors for God, letting God make God's appeal to people to be God's people through us.... Through the way we live our lives....

“Let me go from this quiet place all brave again... all sure of truth... Let me go seeing life with steady eyes, missing no lovely thing, yet turning never from the ugliness... Let me go out seeing folk against the picture of God’s heart... Let me go out all strong again to fill my niche a little better for this quietness, here. Here - Where I may close my eyes and trust God, may listen and be sure. Be sure that when God takes all life and holds it close, I too can live... All sure of life because I am all sure of God.

Yes.. let us go from this place renewed in our commitment to be Christ’s people in the world... let’s go - and get physical, in order to be really spiritual in our lives. God’s own people, making God’s love known.

Amen.

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