

ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE
Randall Tremba
August 30, 2015
22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

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Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Once upon a time certain patriots complained to Jesus that his disciples didn't observe the law perfectly. They didn't wash their hands, cups, pots and kettles in the correct way that the law prescribed. To which Jesus said (and here I paraphrase even more): *Get over it. That's not what matters. You are fixated on externals and have abandoned "God's commandment."*

And I think we all know what that commandment is. We know it starts and ends with love. *Love God wholeheartedly and love your neighbor as you love yourself.*

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My 50th high school reunion will be in Youngstown, Ohio next Saturday night. I'll be there. So this time next Sunday I will not be here. Just about now next Sunday I will be driving home over the Pennsylvania turnpike.

I don't know how I will feel at that time. I could be soaring on cloud nine, rejuvenated by the collective soul of my awesome brothers and sisters in the South High "Warriors" class of 1965. I could be soaring or I could be in a state of shock, trudging through the valley of the shadow of death having seen—just the night before—that shadow on so many faces once young.

I know how these things go. You see a classmate not seen for 50 years and we both say without saying it out loud: *Oh, my god, what happened to you!* And what can you say except: *gravity sucks*. So please, let's just love one another and be kind before the grim reaper comes to collect us all.

I graduated in 1965 just as the war in Vietnam was heating up. The brand new Ford Mustang was just out and very hot. And the hottest dance song of the summer was *I Can't Get No Satisfaction*—a satanic song channeled by Keith Richards straight from the Devil himself. Or so I was told.

I never got to dance to that Rolling Stone's blockbuster because my fundamentalist Baptist church of born-again Christians disapproved of dancing since dancing could lead to...well, *sex*.

My church also disapproved of card playing because that could lead to gambling which could lead to strip poker which could lead to...well, *sex*.

Oh, and I couldn't go to movies—not even *The Ten Commandments*—because that would support the *sex-crazed* Hollywood movie industry and, besides, what if Jesus returned in the clouds of heaven to "rapture" true believers while I was sitting in a darkened theater making out with some Catholic girl. In that case, I was told more than once: Jesus would leave me behind to endure "The Great Tribulation." It's in the Bible, don't you know.

As you can see, I was raised as a hard-core fundamentalist. Jesus is *the way, the truth and the life*. Believe that or go to hell like John Lennon for saying the Beatles were more popular than Jesus. Yeah, boy, he'll burn in hell for that, I said back in 1965. And it won't help him to "imagine no hell below us" cause he'll find out there really is such a real place for people like him.

I was raised a hard-core fundamentalist.

And so, under pressure from the pastor, Sunday School teachers and my parents, I felt obligated to “witness for Christ” now and again by telling my classmates that they’d really and truly *get no satisfaction* in life unless they became born again Christians just like me. Please repeat this “sinner’s prayer” after me and you’ll be saved and if you don’t you’ll go to hell, I told them.

It’s a wonder I had any friends in high school. But I did.

Maybe it’s because I happened to be a little bit witty, clever and humorous at times. Or, maybe it’s because I was on the starting varsity basketball team. Or maybe it’s just because those irreligious, unregenerate, unborn again, degenerate classmates of mine were a whole lot kinder than I.

Anyway, I was lucky. I had plenty of friends who liked me despite certain weird religious ideas and practices.

Out of a graduating class of 300 or so I maintained friendships with exactly three and, as luck would have it, those three were on the reunion planning committee. And so when the matter of who will “say grace” before dinner came up, guess whom they called?

At first I declined. “Please, don’t put me in “the minister” role for the rest of the night.”

But when they said I’d have five minutes, I thought: *Hmmm, this could be an opportunity.* Maybe instead of me just “saying grace” we could all experience *grace* in a fresh way. A lot could be done in five minutes and it wouldn’t have to be just me talking.

After all I can say “grace” in less than a second. See I just did.

Of course the committee meant something more than that but that’s what they said: “Say grace.” And that got me thinking about grace and how we express it and how we experience it. So given five minutes I thought I might say something like this:

“Before I offer a prayer for our meal tonight, I’d first like to acknowledge how life changes us, outwardly and inwardly. I’m guessing you’ve discovered what I’ve discovered over the past 50 years: *life is hard, sometimes very, very hard; but something else is true: grace abounds—sometimes in amazing ways.*

For example, when I graduated in 1965 with all of you, I thought my religion was the way, the truth, and the life. But I found out it wasn’t. Over the years, I looked deep and wide, connected a lot of dots and experiences and discovered that love is the way, the truth, and the life. I came to see there are really only two religions: being right and being kind.

As it turns out Jesus and John Lennon were both right: *Love is all you need.* And it’s also true as Mick Jaeger put it: “*We don’t always get what we want.*” But more often than not, “*we get what we need.*” And what we and the world need now—as Dionne Warrick sang back then: *What the World Needs Now is Love, Sweet Love.* It’s so obvious to me now. How did I ever miss it way back then?

So tonight before we eat I invite you to show a little lovin’ to those old people at your table. Turn to the person beside you and say, Joe or Josephine or whatever name, I knew you when you were a lot younger, but I want you to know: *tonight I can see that you are more beautiful than ever.*”

That round at the table will take about a minute. And then I’ll say in my remaining one minute: “And that, my friends, is what I believe grace is. Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder. And when you see it: say so.

And now this prayer before we eat. Please repeat after me:

Love before us, love behind us, love under our feet. Love within, love over us, let all around us be love."

And, finally I'd say: "If that's not saying *grace*, what is?"

What do you think? Is that worth a try?

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Hymn 693
"Though I May Speak"