

1 John 4:7-21    The Gaza Road  
Acts 8:26-40  
May 2, 2021

Good morning, what a beautiful May day to ponder together the things of God. Much of life is lived on the surface. On the surface life is based on how one feels, looks. It has to do with matters of taste, things that repel and delight, give pain and pleasure.

Beneath that there are more “intermediate” concerns, things beneath the surface but not “in the depths.” On this level, one becomes aware of other people and the care one must have for them. One often notices that what is a little deeper may come into conflict with what is on the surface. When thinking of the well-being of others, those we know and love, or other people generally, surface level things fade.

Beneath that there is a level so deep that we are often unaware of it. As human beings, we are driven by the instinct to preserve our own lives, and moral decisions made at intermediate levels are cast aside. Much of the world’s conflict is the result of these penultimate issues playing out under the surface.

Then there are ultimate questions. Matters that are really so far down that human beings only at their most reflective can even consider, and are generally beyond the human capacity for depth. These are the things of God, and we are here to think about them.

Isaiah writes about it this way;

“Who had understood the mind of the Lord, or instructed God as a counselor, who taught God the right way? Who was it that brought him knowledge or showed God the path of understanding?”

With this framework in mind, consider these things:

Science is good at the surface, we must trust it there, it tells us about what our senses can perceive. What we call the social sciences are best at the deeper level levels, helping us understand how and why the world has developed the way it has. Religion, Christianity in particular, is about the ultimate questions, at least they begin there. Meaning is derived from the depths, not the surface.

Our two texts for the day take us on a journey but in very different ways. In the epistle we are given one of the most remarkable statements about God to be anywhere found. We are taught that the connection between the divine nature and the concept of unselfish love are so close that John goes ahead and comes right out with, “God is Love,”

There are other statements that could be made; God is beauty, God is Truth, God is righteousness, God is mercy, God is Life. We could talk about why we don’t say, love is God, or truth is God, but that is for another time. Some of these ideas stem from the implications of biblical themes and some are forthright, yet there is no other fuss made as big as the one made about “love.”

And the connection is strong. Those who *love* are of God, God is in them and they are in God. Those who do not love are not of God, God is not in them and they are not in God.

Because the bible speaks so often about mercy for sinners and tells stories about flawed people that God's accepts, we must temper some of John's absolutism here. The people who love and thus are in God sometimes fail. Most people are capable of love sometimes and in certain ways, and all of us are capable of failures of love.

We are mixture of unselfish concern for the well-being of others and stubborn refusal to be concerned at all about anyone other than ourselves. But what is clear is that a relationship with God is meant to produce love and goodwill towards others.

We are on the level of ultimate questions. What is revealed is that unselfish love is God's nature. No one had really talked about God in this way before. It is good for us to just listen to it from time-to-time, and let some of it sink down and stick to our ribs, get past "skin deep," if you will. *God is Love.*

The other story comes from the Book of Acts and provides an example of how sometimes God's love plays out. After the stoning of Stephen, the early believers were scattered. This scattering was one of the ways the gospel spread. God redeems bad things.

Philip, who along with Stephen, had been one of the seven deacons chosen to help distribute food so the apostles could concentrate on spiritual things, turned apostle himself, heading south down the Gaza Road that led to Egypt under the guidance of the Spirit.

Along the way he ran into an African who happened to be a eunuch. The man was reading the Book of Isaiah and not understanding it. So Philip helped him and the man was baptized and later went home to Ethiopia. The strike against him was that he was a eunuch, forbidden to worship at the temple.

And yet it is in the Book of Isaiah that we are told that by God's grace eunuchs *would be* accepted. The unacceptable become acceptable. God's love playing out on the surface. That is a part of the bible's message and it was revealed along the Gaza Road, after the stoning of Stephen when the Christians were scattered.

There are two lessons today:

1 - The personal being at the heart of all that is, is love; completely unselfish, redeeming love.

2 - This love bubbles to the surface from time to time, when extraordinary things happen, like on the Gaza Road where someone forced to run away from danger in one direction, bumped into a prepared path in another, and God's love was shared.

Think on it. Then just try to live only on the surface.

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