

To Be Loved, To Love, To Become Love

A Reflection by Fred Spring Sunday, Oct 22, 2006

Good Morning.

I'm a Christian.

Christ invites you.

I invite you ...

To be with God in our hearts, our minds, our being.

The message today is about my pursuit to find my basic simple beliefs. Beliefs so simple that they provide me uncluttered clarity of direction as I journey with Christ to God.

By simple, I don't mean small or insignificant,

What I mean is quite the opposite ...

A simplicity that reveals a bigger grandeur.

I'm referring to the kind of simplicity that

reduces my baggage,

reduces my clutter,

That even evaporates many obstacles that I keep tripping over.

A simplicity that allows me to put things in perspective ...

that offers me ... more clarity ...

That deepens and broadens my life...

That even lifts me up ...

And ... brings me closer to God.

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I invite each of you to take a few seconds

to recall when God's presence started stirring inside you.

Can you remember when you first became aware of God ... coalescing with your inner being, ...

creating that indivisible, loving bond within you ?

When was that special moment for you ?

For me, I believe it happened at my baptism.

Some of you have heard me proclaim my baptism ... by immersion ... when I was 12 years old.

I truly believe that my baptism transformed me.

Somehow, God ignited inside me.
As Emeril says, “BAM”, I got “KICKED UP A NOTCH”.

From a spark to a small flame,
Like the small gas “pilot” lights on our old kitchen stoves.

It was back then that the Holy Spirit started “BURNING” inside me.
I was blessed beyond anything I could comprehend at that age.

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So, how does this tie into my simplicity message ...

Well, the Holy Spirit certainly did NOT simplify my life.
In fact, it did just the opposite.

It slowly ADDED complex challenges for me ...
It interfered with some, maybe many, of my teen-year desires.
And, yet, frequently, it threw me spiritual lifesavers ... When I was drowning.

In fact, when I was 20,
I jotted down a poem that expressed
the conflicting qualities that
plagued me throughout my teen years.

I called it “Adolescence”

*I was a young man.
Adulthood anticipating.
Mentally forward.
Spiritually blessed
Yet, bound in my flesh...
Never ending
My Red-Blue life.*

To put it simply, “SIMPLE” was not on my map ...
Not even in my dictionary.

Like many of us, relating to Lisa’s message last week ...
My life went into overdrive.

I was busy getting married,
Continuing college at nite school,
Advancing my working career.
Having children ... 4 blessed gifts ... Thank you God ...
They are my greatest contribution to this world ... and to You.
They are links in my circle of life.

By the time I was 29 years old,
I was resigned to the fact that at this pace,
I would not make it past my 39th birthday.

But, obviously, I did!
39 years + one day ... what a gift ...
Each additional day ... another gift ... beyond my expectations.

But, Simplifying my life, forget it!

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Let’s fast forward several years ... a lot of years ...
To somewhere in the mid 90’s ... 1990’s that is.
Back in the last century.
Gosh, I’m old.

Anyway, it was about a decade ago
WHEN, as many of us older folks do ...
I started on another of my ... Quote ... “Life” journeys ... “my quest
for simplicity”.

This time ... to MY MOUNTAIN ... looking for MY GURU.
The one who was going to spell out my reasons for living.
To reveal my purpose for being ...
My connection to the universe ...
In CLEAR and SIMPLE terms.

Well, of course, it didn't happen.
My guru was a no show ... I was on the wrong mountain.

So, disappointedly, I started back down the mountain,
dragging my huge sack filled with confusing clutter ... that I'd acquired over
many years ...
quips, and quotes, and clichés ...
and laws, and trivia, ...
and Old Testament, and New Testament pathways and promises.
Endless, disconnected "stuff" ...
A lot of valuables ... and a lot of junk.

So, my journey to that mountain was a dead end.
I was looking for a quick fix, ... and it was nowhere to be found.

But, I still had this intense drive inside me ...
yearning for clarity, understanding, simplicity.

Why wasn't it coming to me?

No matter how I tried to put the pieces together, I couldn't.

It was like I was on a merry-go-round ... not getting anywhere.

I looked around for my pillar, my God.
Where was He?
I needed Him.

Had He abandoned me ... forsaken me?

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No, of course not.

HE would never LEAVE ME.

I HAD DISTANCED ME FROM HIM.

Had I drifted too far?

How do I get back?
How do I go forward again ?

**When was the last time you felt spiritually depleted?
How did you recover ... regain your God, your Christ?**

As for me, I had to pick myself up, dust myself off, and continue my pursuit.

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We all know that the Holy Spirit works in mysterious and wondrous ways.

Well, He was working on me, wisely, quietly.

Not with a 2X4 to the side of my head.

Not with parades and fireworks.

He simply held my hand and asked me to open my heart to those around me.

To observe and to listen to my world, not with my eyes and ears, ...

but with my heart.

I did.

I practiced and practiced.

I consciously made an effort, a real effort.

I worked hard at it.

And, amazingly, my entire world started looking different to me.

Over the next few years, people previously unknown to me,

Were joining me on my journey... clearing the brush ...

guiding me to the real path.

How well I remember Joseph Campbell.

I met Joseph Campbell, not in person, but thru my television screen.

Do any of you remember watching his PBS series on *The Power of Myths, (cultures and religions)*? It was a 6 part miniseries hosted by Bill Moyers.

Somehow I was drawn to Joseph, like he was personally reaching out to me.

His deep knowledge, wisdom, kindness and spirituality floated into my heart.

As he offered me the insights of numerous religions and traditions, I found myself going back, back along a path I had slowly, imperceptibly strayed from.

Yes!!, Eureka!, I realized that the choice I made many years ago ...
My choice TO BE A CHRISTIAN was absolutely the ONLY choice for me.

The Holy Spirit outdid Himself.
He “kicked me up a bunch of notches” all at once ...

And laid me at Jesus’ feet.

“Jesus, ... it’s me... I’M BACK!”

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My ensuing encounter with Jesus went something like this.

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Obviously nervous, and not knowing what to say next,
I asked him to rid me of the confusing bag of stuff I’m carrying around.
And, that I desperately want to simplify my life.

He reached down, took my hand, and lifted me up ...
placed His arm on my shoulders and said, “*Come, walk with me.*”

He asked me to recall several of His teachings.

Starting with His 3 commandments.
You know them well ... the ones in our VISION STATEMENT.

Please read them along with me. They’re on the back of our bulletin.

TO LOVE God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

TO LOVE our neighbors as ourselves.

TO LOVE one another as Christ has loved us.

“*You see*”, He said, “*it’s truly quite simple. God’s realm is centered in love.*”

And then he added, “*The cup I pass to you, Fred, is to live a love-filled life.*”

Then silence ... long silence ... He glowed in the silence.

But my mind was buzzing with countless thoughts, ideas, and questions.
I sorted thru them, trying to pick out the most important ones.

Finally, I asked Him to help me, to explain for me ...
HOW do I LIVE these loves ? ... These 3 great commandments ?
HOW do I KNOW when I'm LIVING IN GOD'S LOVE ?

He softly said to me, as he blended into the distance ...
"Go and learn from my teachings ... everything you need is there."

So there I was. My baggage still full ... but this time with new direction ...
my Christ compass.

Days passed into months ... months passed into years.

And during this time, thru hard work, and prayer, and study, ...
and listening to my heart ...
and WITH YOUR HELP, you, my brothers and sisters ...

I discovered this ...

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I have only 3 basic needs in my life ... That's as simple as I can get !

And they are:

To Be Loved

To Love

To Become Love.

And that "THE CUP" Jesus invites me to drink from ...
is to align my entire living, everything I do, to these 3 basic needs ...
To Be Loved ... To Love ... To Become Love

So, how do I turn this esoteric mantra into my reality?

First – TO BE LOVED ...

This is MY need – born of MY FLESH – **MY NEED TO BE LOVED BY YOU.**
If I didn't seek and accept your love, I know that I would emotionally starve.
For me to survive ... to be alive ... I need you to love me.

MY SECOND NEED – TO LOVE ... is the ESSENCE in MY CUP !

To love all of you, my friends, my acquaintances, those whom I have yet to
meet, even to love my enemies.

Of course it's easier to love you if you accept my love, and especially if you love me in return; but, God asks more of me.

So, how can I love my enemies, ...
and especially those who destroy and kill ?

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"Listen ... Fred ... Listen Listen to your heart."

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"Go, and learn from my teachings ... everything you need is there."

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... in John chapter 17 ... Jesus is praying with God ...

"The glory that you have given me, I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one. I in them and you in me, that they may become one .."

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I TRULY BELIEVE THAT WE ARE ONE ... YOU WITH ME ... ME WITH YOU ...
AND ... EACH WITH GOD !!!

This SIMPLE BELIEF is at the CORE OF MY BEING.

And because God lives in every one of us, I cannot deny my love to any one.

I am summoned to SEEK God IN EVERY ONE, even those who suppress His presence

AND I am resolved to contribute to their awareness of God
to bring God UP, INTO their lives.

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Another way I LIVE "TO LOVE", is BY STRIVING TO BE His humble servant, ... TO SERVE HIM by doing "...UNTO THE LEAST OF THESE ...".

Like you, I feel God's love coming back to me, when I do for others.

Like keeping my pledges current here at TCC, ...

Contributing to my favorite missions and charities, ...

Placing a couple of dollars into the red pot, AND blessing the shivering bell ringer, ...

But, much, MUCH more than the dollars I give, is when I GIVE OF MYSELF ...
serving on committees & at functions,

offering you our communion cup ...

extending my hand and embrace in friendship ...

looking you straight in the eye and talking with you, not at you.

Validating your worth, **NO MATTER WHERE YOU ARE.**
Accepting your offer to walk with you on your journey.

IN CHRIST'S NAME ... I offer YOU my servitude.

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Let me now explain what I mean by **MY THIRD BASIC NEED ...**

... TO BECOME LOVE

This love is my VISION ... my greatest YEARNING ... my PROMISED LAND.

To carry the love I've **RECEIVED**, and the love I've **GIVEN** ... **OUR CIRCLE OF LOVE ...**

OFFER IT TO GOD ...

AND BECOME COMPLETELY IMMERSSED IN HIM.

So that **HE AND I ARE ONE ...**

So that **I, CAN NO LONGER DISTINGUISH ME FROM HIM.**

So that **I, HAVE BECOME LOVE ...**

WITH NO BEGINNING, AND, NO END ...

MY GOD.

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I'd like to close by responsively reading one of my favorite prayers ...
the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi .

You will find it enclosed in your bulletin.

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.
Where there is hatred, **let me sow love.**
Where there is injury, **pardon.**
Where there is doubt, **faith.**
Where there is despair, **hope.**
Where there is darkness, **light.**
Where there is sadness, **joy.**

Oh divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled **as to console,**
to be understood **as to understand,**
to be loved **as to love.**

**For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.**

Amen