

Oct 27, 2024

Pr. Steve

Texts: Jeremiah 31: 31-34; Psalm 46; Galatians 5: 1; John 8: 31-36

In the name of God, Abba/Imma, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

*The reign of Love is ours forever. Forever.*

The question is asked sometimes, whether directly or indirectly, ‘*Does [Pr.] Steve use the real Bible?*’ I studied 6 years of Greek and the New Testament. I studied 5 years of Hebrew to read the Hebrew Scriptures. I studied 2 years of Latin and 3 years of German—because ‘*God is a German Lutheran*’—at least we were taught that.

And all of those studies put me deeply in touch with a never-ending wisdom of the truth that the Word of God is alive, healing, transforming, and at work among us today. It is Ever Ancient and Ever New. Like the Prophets of old—Biblical conservatives who took the Word seriously and therefore became social radicals—I too hope that my in-depth studies of the Word lead to constructive actions for social change.

Luther had this most beautiful image. He said the Bible is the manger for the baby. The baby is that Word alive, transforming us—and it's all about the baby. (Not how many verses you've memorized. Hmm.) ‘*For freedom Christ has set us free.*’ [Galatians 5:1] How shall we live into that freedom?

The classic Reformation of 500 years ago had a profound impact on the lives of people throughout northern Europe. Education became precious—and especially the education of women—a deep and radical commitment to that, as well as the education of children. Sciences were accepted and worked with. The people had a radical political change. It changed the entire lives of the western world. Music and arts flourished in new ways. And the seeds of what became democracy were sown. That's a lot. It hit people in the guts, it made a difference. And everything changed.

But the Church today is drifting, shrinking, barely even a sidebar anymore, right? Not an ‘influencer’ in the culture. And there's a whole variety of reasons for this which I'm not going to get into today. But what are those Reforming Movements that we need to pay attention to, from within ourselves and around? What is that which will strike the hearts and the core of people once again, to awaken this sense of freedom for which we have been made?

I'd like to speak about one thing in particular, and that is—*our very notion and understanding and experience of God has gotten warped*. In the earliest days of the Church, the Trinity, the Communion in Union, the community God, was what was vitalizing the lives and faith of people. That God was on the move, constantly creating and renewing people, the times, the possibilities. But we have shrunken God over the centuries and reduced God to God, the Father Almighty—‘*Do not get in his way!*’

And we treat Jesus with the same kind of thing. He's a solitary, he's exalted, he's exceptional. But it's a one-man show. And the best you can do is follow from a distance and, I mean a great distance. ‘*You people need to stay back, way back.*’

And the Holy Spirit. “*Who, we ask?*” The Spirit seems irrelevant to us. A late addition, a mere add-on to the Trinity.

It has been this shrinking of the Trinity which has shrunken us, and we miss the vitality of the Community God—the Abba/Imma, the hidden One yet who is always present, who has birthed the whole cosmos through Love, *who most profoundly is the Father/the Mother of the Son*. That's the crucial thing, the crucial relationship!

That Son becomes incarnate so that Divine Love becomes real among human beings so that Love can be experienced, understood and lived into. *And the core of Jesus' life is the intimacy with the Abba/Imma. He is constantly praying, and contemplating, and going into the wilderness to recenter himself in the depth of that relationship—which he wants for all of us. And that's been the missing part. He lives this life in order that the bounty of that intimacy—that deep down sense of knowing who we are—might become ours so that we can live from that dynamic intimacy.*

And he gets crucified for it because we really resist loving each other, don't we? ‘*Don't push us that far. We want to be loved, but we don't know about loving other folks*’. Right? And the Holy Spirit who calls, enlightens, sanctifies, dances innovation, creativity, possibility into our lives through that overflowing Love (as I have said often) is written out of the core experience of our faith, as if the Spirit is nonexistent and non-essential.

Now we have begun to experience the Dance of the Community God in the community at Peace, which is marvelous. I like the insight which says, ‘*We don't gather to just hear a message, we gather to share the message.*’

And that's happening, thank God. But here is the blatant truth that sets us free—God needs us. And we as a congregation stop short and ask, “How can that be—God needs us?” We know we need God. Actually, everybody on the planet knows they need God down deep. In times of crisis there are no atheists.

But that God needs us? This is what Jesus’ work is informing us and inviting us into—that God needs who we are. That's the most important thing about us. God needs who we are to be manifested in this world, in this time. That's why we're here to innovate, and create with what we know, what we love, what we've been given, to bring blessings to folks in all kinds of circles, small ways and large.

God needs us. Can we take that in? What God needs are persons. We live in a society filled with individuals—isolated, alienated individuals who aren't sure what the point is anymore. To become a person means needing other persons. It's moving into wholeness—the acceptance of one’s self and the willingness to relate to people, to sentient beings, to the earth. Relationship becomes everything because we are not just these isolated skinbags. No, no, we're so much more.

So, here's the invitation on Reformation Sunday—three things.

One—try to see everything in the face of God. See everything through the eyes of the One who sees us through the eyes of Mercy and Understanding. That's why we need to pray and contemplate. Try to see all in God and God in all. Let this become the guiding practice. It's not easy but try.

The second thing is—yearn for what God yearns for. As we pray in the Lord's Prayer, ‘*Your yearning be done on Earth as it is in heaven.*’ (I did not like the translation ‘*Your will be done*’ because it sounds like a Marine colonel—and it's all about obeisance and compliance. That's not what the text says. Believe me—I've studied those languages.) ‘*Your yearning be done*’, the ache of your heart, O God, the longing for which you live for us. ‘*O God, may I be in touch with those yearnings, too.*’

And the third thing is—try, just try to bring love to every situation you encounter. That's a lot. It's good enough. Sometimes it works. Often times, it doesn't. It's okay—just try. Try, and bring that love to every situation possible. Then you will be experiencing—as the Prophet Jeremiah said—the God who no longer lives just out and beyond, but from within.

*“From within, I will plant my love in their hearts, from the least to the greatest. They shall know me from within. ‘You shall be my people. I shall be your God.’”* [Jeremiah 31: 33]

We are one. That's the real Bible.

Amen.

The peace, which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.