

## Multiply or Divide?

Back in my seminary days some 40 years ago (ouch!) our homiletics professor said there is one thing you need to know about preaching: in one hand hold the New York Times and in the other hand hold the Bible.

He explained that preaching with just the New York Times in hand is simply political commentary, while preaching with just the Bible in hand may give some sweet spiritual goose bumps, but those goose bumps don't last and the hunger for something more connected to real life returns.

And he was right.

Seeing current events through the lens of Scripture, and reading Scripture through the lens of current events is as old as the Bible itself.

Imagine the headlines in the Cairo Post when the Hebrew people went on a full scale slave revolt and marched out of Egypt, with Pharaoh's hani brother Moses leading the charge!

Imagine the Jerusalem Gazette when the prophet Amos got all wound up and started writing letters to the editor against the Rodeo Drive fat cats of the day, charging that the high and mighty sugar daddies will soon be thrown out, condemning the society gals "who oppress the poor and crush the needy, who say to their husbands, 'Bring us some drinks!'"

Yes, the front page of the paper always and everywhere intersects with Holy Scripture.

Today's front page is all about division; whether it's the children divided from their parents at the border or the division in our political discourse or the division that rivals like Russia seek to sow not only in the US but between our nation and those of our long standing allies.

In fact, our politics has become so poisonous that while 50 years ago few cared what political party their fiancée belonged to, today it's reported that one's political party affiliation is often a deal breaker for a marriage!

Yes, it seems that division is the coin of the realm, it's the air we breathe, the water we swim in.

But the world that God begs us to enter is a world that rejects division.

God's world, a world we are free to enter anytime we wish, it's a world where multiplication is king.

How do we get there?

By changing our standpoint.

Allow me to explain.

Most of us stand in the world of the market economy, an economy that "depends upon anxiety, self-preservation, competition" and a me-first view of the world. Jennings, *The Insurrection of the Crucified*. 92.

It's a world where there is never enough, where striving and ladder climbing are all the rage, even if the ladder is leaning against the wrong wall!

It's our Monday through Saturday world, it's a world that says if I don't look out for me, no one else will, and it turns words like tithing and giving generously into sentimental jokes.

But Jesus stands in what we might call the economy of generosity. Id.

In that economy, manna falls from the sky to feed hungry freed slaves, and five loaves and two fish somehow become enough to feed 5000, with lots left over.

And the question that hangs between these two standpoints is this:

Does giving lead to nothing or does giving lead to everything?

In the market economy, giving is a path to nowhere, to loss, to emptiness.

It's all about division, and everyone knows that 5 loaves of bread and two fish divided by 5000 people equals exactly NOT ENOUGH.

But the economy of generosity begins with a truth.

The truth that we not only come from God and shall return to God, but that in all of this "in between time," we belong to God.

That the Source of all life, of all love, holds us close, and never lets us go, who is always here, if not in our room, then just outside our door, where he waits. Eckhart.

And so Jesus has the people sit in groups on the green grass, creating, what in the original Greek is called a symposia.

That's nice, you may be thinking.

What's that??

A symposia is a word from the Greek philosopher Plato, and (fun fact!) its the only time this word is used in all of the New Testament.

A symposia is a fellowship of eating and drinking — while discussing the many varieties of love. Jennings, 92.

Today Jesus creates a symposia from a motley crew that could just as well be a gaggle of democrats and republicans, white, black and brown, of today.

We know people of all kinds were attracted to Jesus, from wealthy Nicodemus and the wife of Herod's butler to school teachers and dentists and the poor and outcast.

And with that mishmash of people (who otherwise wouldn't be caught dead with each other), Jesus feeds them and then, leads a discussion about the varieties of love: what it's all about, where it comes from, how can we get some?

And I wonder, can we start having that discussion with one another?

Not only in our homes and here in the church, but in the wider community too?

Can we come to the realization that our problem is not solving problems, our problem is that we are disconnected from each other, we are disconnected from God.

How might we reconnect?

Perhaps first by remembering exactly who we are.

That we are physical beings — with souls.

It was the poet who reminds us,

"By remembering that our soul is not heart, liver or spleen, but that which gives life to them.

That our soul is not memory or desire, but it uses these things as its hands and feet.

That our soul is not the intellect or the will, it is their master, it is the background of our being, an immensity that can never be possessed.

And because we are physical beings — with souls — from within every human being a light shines into the world, reminding us that of ourselves we are nothing, but the light is all, and when we allow that light to shine through us, we become all with the all.

When the soul flows through the intellect, it creates genius.

When the soul flows through the will, it creates the virtuous person.

When the soul flows through affection, it gives birth to love.” RW Emerson, *The Oversoul*, paraphrased.

To put it less poetically, perhaps we can reconnect with God when we get out of our own way.

When we give up the levers of needing to control people, places and things.

And perhaps most importantly when we move from living in our yesterdays and in our tomorrows (places far too many people spend their whole lives!) and instead make the courageous leap to live solely and exclusively and permanently in the NOW, which is, after all, the only real life that exists.

That kind of life, living only in the NOW, may feel like walking on water, because the lure of past memories and anxieties over what comes next can feel overwhelming.

But if we begin to trust Jesus’ economy of generosity, we ever so slowly begin to experience that giving doesn’t lead to having nothing, but we learn the truth — that giving leads to having everything!

It’s a message our nation needs to learn once again, as we are living in times that seek to retreat and hide and conserve.

If a fruit tree fails to give fruit, it is eventually cut down.

It's no different for people or nations.

Unless we give we shall die - only generosity leads to life.

But how can we know that as we navigate these rough waters?

Why, here comes Jesus, striding on the waves, telling us in no uncertain terms,

Relax!

"I am.

Don't be afraid!"

How can we practice this?

Close your eyes for a moment and listen...

Be still and know that I am God.

Be still and know that I am.

Be still and know.

Be still.

Be.\*

+amen

\*R.Rohr, Everything Belongs, 62

