

Sermon notes/follow-up

Pastor Rich Lusk

“The Ecclesiological Argument: Showing the World a Better Way to Live”

John 13:31-35, 17:20-26

I have to start with a correction of a serious error in Sunday’s sermon. I was right to link John’s gospel with the Day of Atonement liturgy in Leviticus 16. In fact, I have preached on the deep connection between John’s passion/resurrection account and Leviticus 16 more fully in the past: <http://trinity-pres.net/audio/sermon13-03-31.mp3>

But in this particular sermon, I misspoke at a key point. I described the high priest on the Day of Atonement wearing the breastplate with 12 stones representing the 12 tribes of Israel. The high priest did normally wear the breastplate, along with his garments of glory and beauty, when he offered incense (= prayer) to the Lord (John 17). But the high priest took off these vestments (including the breastplate, presumably) when he went into the Most Holy Place to sprinkle blood on the mercy seat on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:4). Theologically, the point I made is true: The high priest was a corporate person and so he brought the Israelites with him in his heart representatively when he entered into the Most Holy Place. But in my haste I misspoke – the high priest most likely did not wear the breastplate when making atonement in the Most Holy Place.

In fact, robing, disrobing, re-robing was an important aspect of the liturgy of Leviticus 16 and plays a key function in John’s account of how Jesus fulfilled the Day of Atonement. The vestments are linked with glory. The priest removed his garments of glory and beauty on the Day of Atonement, because the high priest was bearing the sins of the people. Making atonement was not glorious in any ordinary way; it was an act of humility and de-glorification. Like the high priest, Jesus removed his outer garment in order to serve the disciples in an acted out parable of the cross, as he washed the disciples feet (Jn. 13:4). Further, Jesus is stripped by the Romans. Jesus is crucified naked – but, unlike Adam, he is naked and *unashamed* because he has no sin to be ashamed of. Thus, in some sense, his cross is also the first step in his glorification (John 12:23, 32), though it is a hidden and disguised glory that can only be seen with the eyes of faith. When the disciples come to the tomb and find it empty, they see linen burial clothes between the cherubim in the center of a symbolic ark of the covenant (John 20:6, 12; cf. Lev. 16:23). The point is that Jesus has now finished his work of making atonement, fulfilling the Day of Atonement ritual. On the Day of Atonement the high priest would wear a linen garment to offer sacrifice, and when his work was finished, he would take off the linen vestment and leave it behind. This is exactly what Jesus has done. The folded up linen cloth in the tomb screams out an echo of Jesus’ words on the cross: “It is finished!”

For a rather helpful discussion of John 17 and the Day of Atonement, see Michael Reeves' excellent book *Delighting in the Trinity*, p. 71ff. However, note that Reeves' book makes the same mistake I made in my sermon. The artwork on page 72 shows the high priest making sacrifice on the Day of Atonement and depicts him wearing his breastplate with 12 stones. This is probably incorrect, as noted above.

In John 17:24, Jesus prays that we would be with him where he is. Where is Jesus? What location is he talking about? Where does he want us to be?

In one sense, we could say Jesus is in the Most Holy Place. As the true high priest of God's people, he enters into the heavenly sanctuary and we are taken there with him and in him. True, he said earlier that his disciples could not go with him where he was going (John 13:33). In a sense, the disciples could not follow Jesus into the most holy place yet because the veils were not yet torn (just as the Israelites could not follow the high priest into the most holy place on the Day of Atonement). But once he dies on the cross, the veils will be torn, and the disciples will be granted full access to the heavenly sanctuary. We now follow him into the presence of the Father (Heb. 10:19ff).

But there is another way to answer the question of Jesus' location. In John 1:18, Jesus is located in the heart (= "bosom") of his Father. Jesus indwells the heart of his Father; as we indwell Jesus' heart (cf. high priests' breastplate and the "in Christ" and "indwelling" language of the NT), we also come to indwell the heart of the Father. This might explain the posture and position of the beloved disciple in John 13. John 13:23 echoes John 1:18, telling us that the beloved disciple was reclining on Jesus' heart (= bosom). The beloved disciple was "in" the heart of Jesus, just as Jesus is "in" the heart of his Father. We have a set of parallels: In John 1:18 and 13:23, we have one who is beloved resting in the heart/chest/bosom of the lover, enjoying his company and fellowship. I do not think the beloved disciple is being singled out as a unique case; rather, I think he is representative of all disciples. We are "in the heart" of Jesus, just as Jesus is "in the heart" of the Father. The repose of the beloved disciple in Jesus mimics the eternal repose of Jesus in his Father. But of course, because we are in Jesus, his prayer that we would be where he is – in the heart of his Father – is answered. We indwell the Father because we indwell Jesus. We are in the heart of the father because Jesus.

A community in which we love one another as Christ loves us, and as the Father loves the Son, will be a community in which we bring out the best in one another. True love encourages, supports, and serves. A great example of love bringing out the best in the beloved is the friendship between Lewis and Tolkien. Tolkien struggled with discouragement, and would never have finished his masterful middle earth books if not for the urging of others. Lewis has rightly been called the "midwife" of

middle earth because of his role in getting Tolkien to finish the books for publication. Tolkien loaned out draft copies of *The Hobbit* to Lewis and one of his students, Elaine Griffiths. Griffiths passed it along to a publisher, Stanley Unwin, who in turn let his 10 year old son Rayner read it. Rayner gave it such an enthusiastic reception, Unwin decided to publish it, even though there was little hope of commercial success. Of course, after the book took off, the publisher, along with other friends, urged Tolkien to complete further works that included hobbits. Tolkien almost failed to finish the project, but thanks to Lewis' constant encouragement, finally got manuscripts ready for publication. Tolkien expressed appreciation for Lewis after the latter had passed away:

Lewis was a very impressionable man, and this was abetted by his great generosity and capacity for friendship. The unpayable debt that I owe to him was not 'influence' as it is ordinarily understood, but sheer encouragement. He was for long my only audience. Only from him did I ever get the idea that my 'stuff' could be more than a private hobby. But for his interest and unceasing eagerness for more I should never have brought *The L. of the R.* to a conclusion.... (Humphrey, ed., *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, 362).

Had it not been for a loving friendship bringing out his best, Tolkien would never have completed his great literary series, and the world would have missed a great treasure. Had Lewis been envious of Tolkien's gifts, or his success, he would not have encouraged Tolkien the way that he did. Instead, Lewis became Tolkien's biggest fan. True friendship and true community are the catalyst for great achievement. True human flourishing can only happen when we are embracing one another in Christ-like love, glorifying and edifying one another. In the church, we should be fans of one another, cheering one another on to greatness!

As I said in the sermon, the challenge to community is always the same: sin. But sin does take different forms in different contexts. One feature of modern life that subverts true community is generational segmentation. The "generation gap" was largely a product of marketing in our capitalistic, consumerist society. Andy Crouch explains (http://andy-crouch.com/articles/for_people_like_me):

To understand the power of "generation" talk in America, you've got to think like a marketing executive.

One of the cornerstones of modern marketing—closely related to the all-important concept of brand—is the theory of segmentation. Once upon a time, soap manufacturers made soap, a product that pretty much everyone needs. Then along came Proctor & Gamble, who realized that they could make several different kinds of soap and market them to different audiences. In the process, they could sell not just soap (for which consumers would pay a certain price based on supply and demand) but also an additional intangible sense of quality—not necessarily the quality of being a better bar of soap, but the quality of being better for a

particular kind of person (say, a housewife or a busy businessman). Consumers, P&G discovered along with every other modern corporation, would pay for that intangible quality of fitness “for people like me”—and since that quality was intangible and thus very cheap to produce, it was highly profitable.

The goal of the modern marketer is to identify, or, if necessary, create these all-important, brand-defining differences, and sharpen their distinction in the mind of the consumer until he is unwilling to cross that sacred line between Ivory and Camay—much less leave the P&G fold altogether and buy Lever 2000—because that other product just isn’t “for him.” For maximum effect, one must create a self-consciousness in the consumer that encourages him to segment his own world—because once you have a customer with a pre-fabricated sense of where he fits in the consumer universe, the cost of pitching a new product goes down dramatically. The complex and expensive process of convincing your customer that your product meets one of his needs is much less important if you can appeal to a pre-existing set of identity markers. Simply invoke the tell-tale signs of his chosen segment, and he will know that your product is for people like me.

Segmentation works. Ford sells more station wagons by selling two versions, one called the Ford Taurus and the other called the Mercury Sable (can you guess which is for men and which is for women?), than it would if it sold just one—even though under the hood, the two cars are virtually identical. When used to reposition a fading brand—think of the Dewar’s Scotch campaign that took a product formerly associated with your rich, but rather elderly, great-uncle, and placed it in the hands of hip young professionals—segmentation can save a product line and even a company.

What I don’t understand is why so many people think that segmentation can save the church.

“Generation” is, to use a popular term these days, a construct: an artificial convention by which a society agrees to divide up a continuous range into discrete pieces—that is, segments. With one significant exception which we’ll get to in a minute, birth rates are a pretty continuous phenomenon. Babies have been born in North America every day for several thousand years. In some years more are born than others, and it would be fair to say that on average the folks born in one year are likely to be the parents of the folks born twenty-five years later, but there are no hard-and-fast rules. There are no boundaries on the birth charts any more than there is a line running through the soil at the boundary between the US and Mexico. (Of course, the US government has gone to great effort to construct a fence along much of that imaginary line, reflecting the uncomfortable reality that not everyone “sees” the boundary in the same way.)

Crouch goes on to critique the way this practice of generational segmentation has actually subverted the kind of family life the church is called to display. It is certainly not wrong for the church to have some age segmented programs and activities, especially for pedagogical purposes, (e.g., Sunday School), but the church should never let itself be subdivided along generational lines (any more than lines of class or race).

A final note: In the sermon I said that we should love everyone who walks through the doors of our church, even if it's someone with a gun who intends to shoot us. I think the saints in Charleston over the past week have provided an excellent – and challenging — example of the kind of grace, love, and forgiveness that should always be on tap in the church. If we cannot forgive enemies and persecutors, we are not worthy to be called Christ's disciples. At the same time, I want to add that if there was an attacker in our church, love could also take the form of defense. God does not prohibit us from defending ourselves and our loved ones when under attack – and such defense can certainly be seen as an act of love, especially because it always entails risk. When the stronger protect the weaker from harm, they are loving the way Jesus does (John 10).
