

THE LINE

Newsletter of the Convocation Of The West
OF THE MISSIONARY DIOCESE OF ALL SAINTS



Communication is a tricky business. There are many methods, but none works perfectly. Thousands work in “Communications Departments,” yet have no common language with the majority of the world’s population. Even with communication in a shared language, misunderstandings abound. An Englishman walks into a tall building in an American city, and says, “I need to find a lift.” The receptionist says, “I can call you an Uber or a taxi.” In Swedish, “Han är gift” can mean either, “he is married” or “he is poisoned,” an important difference. In our polarized nation, lack of communication between poles breeds fake news, misunderstandings and hostilities. Lack of communication in general ranges from not understanding the assembly instructions for your new furniture to a serious rift in a marriage.

The biggest hurdle of all is communication with God. Mankind has long read signs purporting to be from the Almighty

in a myriad of often contradictory ways. Learning how to read the message accurately is the aim of the Epiphany season, which stretches from Christmas almost to Lent.

Jesus had his earthly birth at Christmas some two millennia ago, as is well known. The date is unimportant, the fact of his arrival is extremely important. It is communicated, first, by a series of prophecies over many centuries, foretelling what kind of person this will be. The actual event is announced by a host of singing, rejoicing angels. The word “angel” in Greek, the main Biblical language, means “messenger.” The news itself is described as “eu-angelos,” or “good news/ message.”

Epiphany further clarifies the message. In Greek, “epiphany” means to shine a light on



The Convocation of the West Summary Statement

We are a missionary people living out the historical, Biblical Christian faith in the Anglican tradition.

something. The challenge facing God is how to effectively achieve that with humans. The season kicks off with three major events, communicating the good news.

The first remembers the arrival of the Three Kings, or Wise Men, in Jesus' early infancy, while the family is still in Bethlehem. The Kings were led by an epiphany, a Star, shining its light on their route from what is now Iran. The message almost from Jesus' birth is that the Gentiles also are included in the soteriological invitation by the new Messiah. "Arise, shine, for your light has come," prophecies Isaiah (60:1,3), "Nations will come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn." For the Jewish establishment, this was disturbing. The Messiah in their view was meant only for Jews. Even more disturbing was that the Three Kings "bowed down and worshipped him" (Matt.2:11). Thus, the first recorded people to worship Jesus were Gentiles, the "nations" mentioned by Isaiah. The Christian community still struggles with this inclusivity. God loves everybody, salvation

descends to be the consecrator (Matthew 3:13-17, Luke 3:21-22). It is a key point. Many in Islam, Judaism and the world in general regard Jesus as a great prophet and inspiration. People calling themselves Christians have said the same. But the authority to be Messiah, to be both God and man, is a necessary qualification to accept. Jesus Incarnate is uniquely able to be the Christ, to speak and act with the infallible authority of God. To deny this, in favor of saying he is a great prophet, is to deny Jesus' own description of himself. Either Jesus is fully God and fully man, or he is a liar. The message is that Jesus is the unique authorized agent of salvation for us all. If Christianity is only about an ethical way to live, we are lost. Only God can act to express his love in the material form of Incarnation to bring salvation to the world. No one else has the authority and effective power to act in conquering death and rising to life.

The third event is the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11), where Jesus does his first miracle, making a large amount of very good wine from water. The message is that Jesus is compassionate about human beings. His love for us is an incarnate love, covering the material aspects of life. A family was about to be shamed by running out of wine at the wedding feast, a major failing in a culture where hospitality is super important. Their reputation was about to be ruined, and the couple would spend the rest of their life with the stigma. It is Mary who first realizes the problem, and Jesus is reluctant to begin his ministry at this occasion. Mary ignores his reluctance and simply directs the servants to do what Jesus tells them.



is offered to everybody. Many resent, or refuse to accept, that simple fact. They keep putting up physical, psychological and spiritual fences whose message is that "everybody" doesn't really mean everybody. But God's message permeates the New Testament, repeated over and over. "Everybody" means just that. Only those who choose to reject the offer are self-excluded. Those a given society sees as being inappropriate are included. Revelation 7 gives a partial list. And Jesus has no hesitation, for instance, in offering the water of life to the Samaritan woman, who was viewed as heretical, living in sin and of the wrong race. If your church does not practice this kind of inclusion, it is time to address and fix it, so the "All Welcome" sign means what it says.

The second commemorated event is Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist. Baptism for the rest of us involves forgiveness of sins, incorporation into the family of Christ and beginning a life as a priest and a monarch (1 Peter 2:9). But for Jesus, with no sins to forgive and already incorporated, baptism is a formal anointing to ministry. It establishes his authority to act as Messiah. No angels conveying the message this time. The Holy Spirit himself

The copious amount of wine which the sommelier of the feast regards as being of excellent quality, reveals the generosity of God's sacramental grace overflowing. John notes the ultimate impact; "He thus revealed his glory and his disciples put their faith in him" (John 2:11).

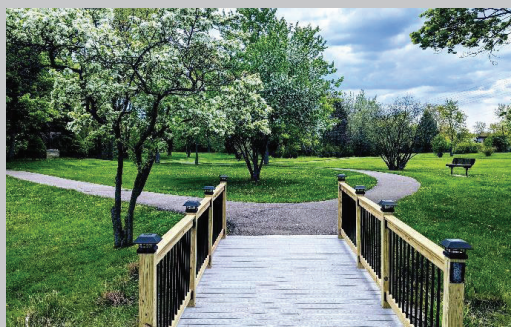
You will seldom hear about this event in many churches, because the message is lost on those whose theology is based on a Puritan, pietistic and legalistic worldview. In their views, miracles are not for such "mundane" matters. If the family was shamed and their reputation ruined, they deserved it. In addition, they say that providing wine is no job for the Messiah or any church leader. That this was prominent as the first miracle is very puzzling to the legalists, who would expect Jesus to refuse a drink of wine, not make gallons of it. Instead, Jesus begins his message of joy in the love of God by making a celebration possible. What could be a better occasion than a wedding, with its analogous connection to God's faithfulness and love for his bride, the Church? His disciples, not being modern religious prudes, got the point, and put their faith in him. God was glorified by the event.

The mercy and love of God shone forth in this epiphany of the disciples (John among them), and John accordingly recorded it.

Messages come in various forms, not just in written or spoken words. The terrorists of 9-11, for instance, did not need words to send their powerful, most evil, message. Jesus' advice to witnesses of his deeds was simply, "Tell what you have seen" (Matthew 11:4-6). The three epiphany events spoke for themselves. They still do. In the love of God for us, salvation has arrived. It is offered to absolutely all, Jew and Gentile alike, as all

can respond in worship, praise and offering to the Christ. It has the authority and power of God behind it. It is a total salvation, of the material and spiritual earth, including us, and the cause of great, everlasting and universal joy and celebration.

In contrast to the muddle of modern messages emanating from church people, the Epiphany message is clear. We are the messengers today, carrying on the Tradition from the angels. Let us be perfectly clear.



Save the Dates!
The Missionary Diocese of All Saints
General Synod
April 2-5, 2024



St. Paul of the Cross Passionist Retreat Center

www.stpaulretreat.org

23333 Schoolcraft

Detroit, Michigan 48223

located 14 miles from airport (DTW)



Check-in Tuesday between 3-6 p.m. & depart Friday before noon



What Is Wrong *with* Unrequited Love

By The Very Rev. Canon Michael Penfield

There is an old Rodgers and Hart song from 1936 that is one of my favorites. It is called “Glad to Be Unhappy,” and it speaks of unrequited love. In fact, one of my favorite lines is:

*“Unrequited love’s a bore,
And I’ve got it pretty bad.
But for someone you adore,
It’s a pleasure to be sad.”*

It seems that the concept of unrequited love was quite popular up until the late sixties. Then, with the sexual revolution, it fell out of fashion. From 1970 until now, songs rarely speak of unrequited love. Instead, we hear such lyrics as this from Stephen Stills:

*“If you can’t be with the one you love, honey
Love the one you’re with”*

But what is so awful about unrequited love? Sure, it’s painful, and rather romantically naïve, but what is wrong with that? Maybe it is precisely because it is necessary to have a rather innocent framework of society to make unrequited love a possibility. After all, you cannot have unrequited love unless you have something that is forbidden, unattainable or simply out of reach. Affairs are out; stealing away someone’s boyfriend or girlfriend, wife or husband would be so improper that for many it would be “unthinkable”. And this was true for the society of yesteryear. But now, we are more like Epicureans than Stoics. If it feels good, do it! After all, “I deserve to be happy.”

Of course, we were never that innocent nor society that naïve. Affairs and “extra-curricular activities” have been going on since mankind was created. Just look at King David. For a saint, he was a bit of a leech. How many wives did he have? And yet he still wanted Uriah’s wife, Bathsheba. He was not a good advertisement for the “joys” of unrequited love.

Yet, even though we do not acknowledge it or honor it as a sort of ideal, I would venture to guess that unrequited love still exists. There are still men and women who find themselves in love with someone forbidden or unattainable. After all, just because we fall in love with someone does not mean they will love us back. This is one of the great lessons of life with which most of us are familiar. And, as an adult, one learns to move on; the love remains, but we look for someone who will love us as much as we love them. But still, unrequited love remains painful.

And the truth is that people still write songs about unrequited love. It’s just that now, it has lost its favor. Our society has moved on, and become too sophisticated for such things – or so it would seem. But unrequited love creeps back into our imaginations every so often.

I recently saw a movie in which one of the characters could be seen as someone who was suffering from a form of unrequited love. However, his unrequited love was for God. The character was a devout Catholic who was also gay. In the course of his life, he was battling between his religious belief and his sexual desires. At the end, he makes the statement that he no longer worries whether God loves him. It is now sufficient for him that he loves God, and he left it at that. This seems to be the definition of unrequited love. And I do not doubt that for many gay and lesbian believers in God, especially amongst the Abrahamic faiths, this feeling captures exactly how they feel. But I think they have it “a bit” wrong.

These life lessons involving unrequited love are there for a reason, and one of the reasons (maybe the chief reason) is to help us understand God, and how He loves us. The problem unfortunately is we humans are too self-absorbed. Like the character in that movie I referenced, we see it all moving in one direction. And given our human concept of love, then God “cannot” love us when we fail, when we fall, or when we sin.

But here is where we are wrong. God loves us – period. Those

things we do that disappoint God are, of course, a problem. But this does NOT mean that God does not love us still. I would even venture to say, being a former atheist, that even denying God's existence does NOT stop God from loving us. However, it does mean our relationship is severed or extremely damaged. What seems clear to me is that, if there is anyone who is suffering from unrequited love, it is not we, but rather it is God.

Look at the history of Israel and Judah. How many times did the Israelites chase after other gods when the true God is there, waiting to be loved by them? Look back at the prophet Hosea. Hosea marries Gomer, whom he knows will be unfaithful. In fact, God wants Hosea to marry her so that he will understand in a much deeper, intimate way how God feels about Israel. It is clear that God loves us; it is also clear that we often ignore Him, refuse His attention, and run after other gods.

God is love. And God loves us. He never stops loving us though it is often unrequited. And in our present society, God is often ignored, avoided, or just plain hated. This does not change God's nature; this does not change the fact that He loves us. But He would never force His love on us.

We have to choose Him. We have to accept His love. And when we do, we must change or else we risk losing that love again, not that God would stop loving us. We risk losing our love for God by not changing because love needs nurturing. And bad habits, in drips or drabs, will eventually take us away from this great love. So, how do we change? How do we show our love for God?

In Saint Paul's letter to the Galatians, speaking on the subject of whether Christians must follow the Mosaic Law, Saint Paul wrote:

*"For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but **only faith working through love.**"*

[(emphasis added) Galatians 5:6 NAB]

This sums up our faith, and it also sums up our goal.

Humans love to create rules and regulations. They create these rules as guideposts to show us when we are in danger of going outside acceptable behavior. Sometimes it is a social thing, like opening the door for a stranger. Sometimes it has a further beneficial goal, such as not littering. And sometimes it is a health and safety goal, such as not driving under the influence of a drug or alcohol or texting while driving. But sometimes we use rules as clubs, like the Pharisees did, to bully, intimidate, and prove our

own superiority.

But Christians have a very non-specific rule: what we should do is express our faith working through love. And may I venture to guess that there are a lot of good Christians out there that hate this rule. It's too loose; it isn't specific enough. And it is subject to abuse. However, it is the reason Saint Paul speaks of Jesus giving us a new freedom – a freedom that some people wanted to take away by imposing the Mosaic Law on all Christians.

To express our faith working through love, we have to look at what Jesus taught us. And to show our love for God, we start by meeting the first two and most important commandments, what Jesus taught us was the summary of the Law. The first is to love God totally. We must love God with all our heart, soul, mind, body and strength. In other words, we must be a faithful lover of God, not chasing after other gods in the hope of a momentary pleasure or a "freedom" that is unfulfilling and unsustainable.

Then we must love our neighbor as ourselves. This means we must change. With do respect to [Love Story](#) ("Love means never having to say you're sorry") or [Bridget Jones's Diary](#) ("I love you just the way you are"), in the real-world love means apologizing sincerely and often, and it means changing and trying to be a better person! And the ultimate reason for all these changes is our love for God.

We live in a self-absorbed society where we perceive most, if not all things, from our perspective and how it will affect us. Love in general and for God in specific brings us out of that myopic view. Soon we realize how we need to change; and we are willing to do this precisely because God loved us first. After all, is there no better way to prove we love someone than by changing? And there is equally no better way to prove we love God than by changing for Him – loving Him absolutely above everything else; and loving our neighbor so that he or she may feel that same incomprehensible love that we feel from God.

It is time we honor the greatest love in our lives by showing it is NOT unrequited. We must show God that the love He feels for us is reciprocated by our love for Him. We must prove that this mutual love is a true and vibrant love. And we should do it by living our faith working through love.

God bless.





Request for a Bishop Coadjutor

The Standing Committee for the Missionary Diocese of All Saints have closed nominations for our next Bishop Coadjutor. Since one of these men will be leading our Diocese in conjunction with our Bishop Ordinary, our other Bishops, our Vicars General and the rest of our Standing Committee, we ask for your prayers that the Holy Spirit will guide us in selecting the right man. I would ask that all our parishes, clergy and laity, pray that God will insure the correct man be selected for this very important job in keeping us within the One, True, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. To this end, Fr. Christopher Parrish of St. Luke's Chapel in the Hills has drafted the following prayer, which I hope will help you:

A Prayer for the Missionary Diocese of All Saints' Selection of a New Bishop Coadjutor

Almighty God, giver of every good gift. Look graciously upon Thy Holy Church, and so guide the minds of those who shall choose a Bishop Coadjutor for the Missionary Diocese of All Saints that we may receive a faithful pastor who will preach the Gospel, care for Thy people, equip us for ministry, and lead us forth in fulfillment of the Great Commission: through Jesus Christ our Lord.

God bless,

Fr. Michael Penfield
Vicar General

