

Memorize & Ponder

**Brentwood Presbyterian Church
August 25, 2013**

It Begins with a Relationship

**John 1:1-5 & Ps 103
(69, 451, 428, 373)**

Have you noticed recently
how hard it is to develop and sustain relationships,
let alone improve them?

If you are looking for one, there are hard to find.
Companies these days are making millions of \$\$\$
matching people up for potential relationships.
I have several friends who found great relationships
through dating services
and several more who are still searching.

If you do find someone, it's hard to navigate
the early stages of the relationship.
You both bring a lot of baggage into this new connection,
some of it good and a lot of it bad.
How do you let go of the old habits and patterns
that damaged earlier relationships
and let this new one grow afresh?

If you've been in a relationship for a long time,
it's hard to keep it evolving as you both grow as human beings.
Shift happens.
Things change.
People change.
Relationships change.
How do you flourish together as you grow?

Those are just a few of the challenges that face us as human beings
in the relationships that are so crucial to our well-being.

It's important to acknowledge and accept
that relationships are crucial to our well-being,
to our flourishing as human beings.

We are designed and created to be in relationships.
We are social creatures.
We cannot live on our own.
It's basic biology and psychology.

Human beings are generated through a relationship
between two human beings.
Regardless of the quality of that relationship,
that's how life begins.

Young human beings cannot survive without the support of relationships.
In every dimension of their being –
Physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual –
human beings need to be in community to grow well.
When we are starved of nourishment in any dimension,
we become diseased and eventually die from that deprivation.

As we mature, everything we do as human beings
is done in community,
with other human beings,
in relationship with other people.
We make friends,
we go to school, we play sports, we find work,
we get married or find a partner,
we have children,
we grow old and need support –
everything is done in community.

Yet the relationships that constitute that community
seem so hard so much of the time.

But there is one relationship that is different.
It is easier than any of us can imagine.

Oh, we can make it difficult.
We can make it more difficult than any of our other relationships.
We can mess with it and mess it up far too easily.

But in the end,
this relationship is easy and it is reliable.

The relationship I'm talking about is our relationship with God.
It is there from the very beginning
and never disappears.
We can ignore it, reject it, dismiss it, deny it,
but it remains.

That what John is talking about
in these opening words of his Gospel that we memorized and pondered this week.

I've mentioned this before,
and drew attention to it again in the insert notes on these verses,
but it is crucial to remember the full range of meanings
for the word 'logos' in Greek
to understand the richness of this passage,
especially as it addresses the question of relationships
in human flourishing.

The English translators of Scripture
normally use the idea of 'word' or 'meaning'
in rendering the Greek word 'logos.'
But beneath and around those ideas are others
that give a deeper and broader sense
of what is being pointed to here.
The richer meaning of the word
involves 'gathering,' 'collecting,' 'speaking,' 'belonging,' and 'listening,'
all crucial dimensions of meaningful relationships.

So, I've come to believe that we can read John's prologue this way:

*. In the beginning was the Relationship,
and the Relationship was with God,
and the Relationship was God.
The Relationship was in the beginning with God.
All things came into being through this Relationship,
and without it not one thing came into being.
What has come into being in the Relationship was life,
and the life was the light of all people.
The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness did not overcome it.*

There are a couple of important insights
into human relationships and flourishing
that emerge from this richer translation for me.

First, this loving relationship that brings life and light
begins with God taking loving initiative and creating it.
Indeed, we are all created by and for this relationship.
We are all beloved children of God,
whether we recognize it or not.
Indeed, our difficulties in other relationships
arise primarily from denying this core relationship.

Second, we don't have to work at creating this foundational relationship.
It is a given.
It is a gift.
God gives us life in community.
God gives us everything we need to make that life a blessing
for ourselves and others.

In our desperation for relationships,
when we lose touch with our core relationship with God,
we find all sorts of ingenious and complex ways
of ignoring and dismissing the presence and power of this God in our lives,
but that does not drive divine love away.
It continues to work quietly and resiliently
to call us into our full potential
in relationship with its healing and reviving power.

That's one of the reasons why John uses the intriguing imagery of light
in this passage.

The light of God's love,
the light of this core, foundational relationship for all human beings,
will never be extinguished by the darkness around us,
whether it is self-imposed or inflicted by others.

That light is perpetual,
flaming at the core of our human being,
striving to be discovered and stoked
as we grow into a flourishing relationship
with God, others, and ourselves.

Here's the primary point I want to make this morning.
Those hard relationships we referred to at the beginning of this sermon
become a lot easier
when we find our core security,
our primary source of affection,
and our true power as human beings
in our relationship with the God who came in Jesus Christ,
full of the grace, truth, and blessing that this relationship alone nourishes.

*May the Spirit take these ponderings
and provoke in all of us
a witness of love and good deeds.*

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