

July 9, 2023

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Simply Love

For the past few weeks we've been hearing the discourse of Jesus calling his disciples and instructing them in how to go about taking on his ministry

In today's portion of that discourse, we get this reflective, wistful moment from Jesus as he breaks out almost into a Shakespearean poem: "But to what will I compare this generation?"

However, rather than a love poem like we heard in our Song of Solomon reading, Jesus' poem is more of a lament on how he and his cousin, John the Baptist, have been woefully misunderstood – John, in the wilderness with his minimalist aesthetic, has been characterized as embodying demons and Jesus as a "glutton and drunkard" for sharing meals with sex workers and tax collectors

like an angsty teenager he feels misunderstood and overlooked – how could his people not get it?

And then the narrative jumps a little bit and Jesus seems to be in a slightly better place about all of this as he says: "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will." (vs 25-26)

None of the scholars that I read get into whether or not Jesus is being sarcastic or serious and so I'd like to think he's being a little bit of both

his comment is a little bit of a dig at the leaders of his tradition who were giving him such a hard time and who he was hoping were within earshot when he makes the comment: "God, I'm so glad babies can comprehend my ministry and that the teachers at school don't" (sticks out his tongue!)

But also that serious side, “O God, thank you for revealing your truth to the youth – those without inhibition and those who are not yet jaded by the world. They get what I’m doing and embody it in ways that those in power are struggling to do so.”

The people in power around Jesus, specifically the religious leaders of his time, were trying to understand Jesus but they had a very different idea of what a Messiah would be and do than what they were seeing in Jesus

In a way, the expectations for the Messiah had become so complicated that when he was right in front of them, they couldn’t perceive him

I sometimes wonder if our lives, our religious and social lives, have become so complicated that when Jesus is right in front of us we don’t always perceive him either

In religious circles we debate about the “right” way to perceive Jesus: some argue that to know Jesus is to claim him as your personal Lord and Savior, others say to know Jesus is to know Jesus’ people in the Body of Christ

some say that to receive Communion one must be baptized, others say that to receive communion one must be curious

some claim that to know Jesus is to deny queer people the right to have a website when they get married, others claim that to know Jesus is to march in the Pride parades

What’s the right way to know Jesus? What’s the right way to be a Christian?

When a lawyer came to Jesus, in another story in Matthew (22:34-40), and asked a similar question “what is the greatest commandment?” Jesus answered, and I’m paraphrasing here, “it’s to love God and love your neighbor”

“It’s simply love” – it’s simply love? How can it be so simple? Don’t you see how complicated the world is, Jesus?

“I thank you, God, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants” (vs. 25)

Sarcastic or serious, hearing Jesus’ prayer this morning cuts right through so much of the noise of those debates, those arguments on who is doing “Jesus” the “right” way

Like the religious leaders of old, we have made following Christ so complicated and convoluted

“it’s simply love” – simply love, Amanda

Now, I know that “love” is not so simple

I know that “love” is seeking justice, “love” is caring for the sick and those in need

I know that Jesus even said “love your enemies”

So, I know that “love” is complicated

But I also know when my motivation is love and when it is not and I know that it makes all the difference in the world

I know when my actions are guided by love and when they’re not, don’t you?

At the end of Jesus’ prayer, he says: “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you

will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”
(vs. 28-30)

it sounds counterintuitive that to hear that just as Jesus has liberated us from the yoke of sin, we are to place another yoke upon our shoulders and be guided like an ox or horse in the fields

But in truth it is exactly the thing I know I need as I got about this world like Paul “I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate” (Romans 7:15)

We need Jesus’ yoke to guide us in the way of love because we are not infants anymore, we are complicated human beings living in a very complicated world

In those moments of greatest frustration with the noise of the world, we need the yoke of Jesus to guide us back to that wisdom of infants: “it’s simply love”

And, I think we will find, as Jesus promised, that his yoke is easy, and his burden is light and in his way of love we will find rest for our souls.

Amen.