

Feeling Better All Over

I Thess 2 1 8 Mt 22 34 40

Let us pray. O Lord of our fellowship, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable and pleasing in your sight, O God, our source, our savior, and our sustainer. Amen.

When my wife Linda and I go home to New Orleans we stop in Nashville on the way down. Nashville is exactly half way. It's a great place to rest from the road and hear some good country music. We stay at the Stadium Ramada. All we have to do is walk across the parking lot of the football stadium to the pedestrian bridge, which overlooks a really cool guitar park, a park shaped like a guitar, and we're downtown. We can stroll along the river or find a place to eat. Every restaurant and bar has good music. You can't play in Nashville though if you don't know your Johnny Cash. Every musician, girl or guy, will say if you have a request for Johnny Cash, just call it out. They say if they don't know it, they can fake their way through it. I always stump them. I request I Feel Better All Over. They look at me with a blank stare. No one knows that tune...I feel better all over more than anywhere else when I'm out with you...

That's how we should feel whenever we are with anyone we love, with anyone we purposefully love, or who purposefully loves us, husband or wife, child or grandchild, parent or grandparent, friend at work, friend at school, friend at church. We should feel better all over more than anywhere else. That's how we should feel of course when we walk with God as God walks with us. And our loving each other, our fulfilling the law, of course also makes God feel better all over, because the best way to love God is to love each other, not that I'm telling you anything you don't already know or put into practice as church.

The Pharisees ask Jesus what is the greatest commandment. He doesn't stop with one. He gives them two; two that go together, that could be one and the same. To love God with all of your heart, soul, and mind, and in other places he adds strength, and a second is like it, to love your neighbor as yourself. Don't forget to love yourself is part of the equation. To love God with all of your heart, with personality, with everything you hold dear, with all of your dreams and visions, with all of your soul, with your essence, your core, with all of your mind, your intellect, every design, every thought, with all of your strength, with all of your determination and will, as John Wesley taught, to take all of your delight in God, and to love your neighbor likewise, fulfills the law. Upon the simple act of love hang all the law and the prophets, the Ten Commandments and the 600 plus laws we receive in Leviticus, and the righteous demands of the prophets, love fulfills them all. Our loving makes God feel better all over.

And we don't have to do it alone. We don't have to do it on our own. When we walk with God, when we put on the mind of Christ, God enables us to fulfill the law. God enables us to love when we see life through his perspective, when we rely not on our own insights but the insight of God. When we try it on our own all those things that oppose love hinders us, keeps us from loving fully. When we see the world through our own needs and wants, our own desires, our own mind and perspective, all those things that oppose us, our own sin, our own faults and frailty, our losses, the chaos of the world around us, keep us from feeling better all over.

When we walk with God as God walks with us, God enables us to see past that opposition, enables us to love and to care.

Lately I've been on a kick of looking for definitions of church when I read scripture. Today though Paul gives us a great definition of being a pastor or a minister. As a pastor to the church of Thessalonica, a church he founded, he writes that because we care for you so deeply, because you are so dear to us, we not only share the gospel of God with you, the good news of Jesus Christ with you, we also share ourselves. That defines being a pastor. But as you know, by virtue of your baptism, you are a pastor, you are a minister for the Lord. Seminary has nothing to do with it. In the pulpit or in the pew, your ordination, your consecration comes from your baptism. It just manifests differently in each of us. Because we all care for each other so much, because we all hold each other so dear, we not only share the good news of Jesus with one another, we also share ourselves...I guess it is a definition of church after all.

I want you to treasure that...treasure how you have cared for and loved each other over the years and the years to come, how you have shared the good news of Christ and also yourselves. I'm a newby here in the grand scheme of things, only four years young here. Some of us have shared God here for twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years...and we will share God and share ourselves for generations to come. Celebrate how your loving makes our community feel better all over, how it makes God feel better all over...

Jesus has one request this morning; that we love God with all of our heart, soul, and mind, and strength, and love our neighbor likewise. The more we are able to see through the perspective of God, the more we are able to rely on his insight, the more we are able to fulfill that request. And when we walk with God, we don't have to fake through anything. It's impossible to go through the motions walking alongside the greatest love ever to walk this earth. That companionship enables us to love as God loves us, to love God by loving our neighbor. It enables us to not only share the good news of Jesus Christ, but also to share ourselves.

Let that pastoral definition define us, define us as individuals and define us as church. Treasure how we have been Christ's ministers since our baptism, fulfilling our baptism by sharing in the Lord for generations past and for generations to come, passing that definition on, making our church feel better all over, making our community feel better all over, making God feel better all over.

Let the Lord know that you do feel better all over more than anywhere else when you're out with him, when he's out with you, and when you're out with those you hold dear. Amen.