

“Faith And Action”

April 25, 2021

Online Worship Service

York United Ministries

Recorded at York Pines United Church

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Prayer for Illumination

Lord God, good shepherd, by the leading of your Spirit, help us to listen for your voice and follow in your paths for all the days of our lives; in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Scripture Reading

1John 3:16–24

¹⁶ We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. ¹⁷ How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

¹⁸ Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. ¹⁹ And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him ²⁰ whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. ²¹ Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; ²² and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

²³ And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. ²⁴ All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

One: This is the Good News of Jesus Christ.

All: Thanks be to God.

<Child in All of Us>

An atheist was walking through the woods. "What majestic trees!" "What powerful rivers!" "What beautiful animals!" He said to himself. Suddenly, he heard a rustling in the bushes behind him. He turned to look . . . and saw a 7-foot grizzly bear charge towards him. He ran as fast as he could along the path. He looked over his shoulder & saw that the bear was closing on himHe looked over his shoulder again, and the bear was even closerand then he tripped and fell. Rolling over to pick himself up, he found the bear was right on top of himreaching towards him with its left paw ...and raising the right paw to strike ... At that instant the Atheist cried out,

"Oh my God!" Time Stopped ... The bear froze The forest was silent A bright light shone upon the man, and a voice came out of the sky ...

"You deny my existence for all these years, you teach others I don't exist and even credit creation to cosmic accidentDo you expect me to help you out of this predicament? Am I to count you as a believer?"

The atheist looked directly into the light"It would be hypocritical of me to suddenly ask you to treat me as a Christian now ...but perhaps you could make the BEAR a Christian?" ... *a pause* ..."Very well," said the voice ...

The light went out. The sounds of the forest resumed ... And the bear dropped his right arm brought both paws together bowed his head & spoke ...

"Lord, bless this food, which I am about to receive"

This is a Christian joke that I received from one of the church members. Nobody wants to be like the atheist in the joke, right? But you know what? The atheist in the joke and atheists in general are logical and smart enough to be atheists. It is not that easy for a logical person to have faith to God. Furthermore, in today's Bible passage, Jesus' commandment is to believe God and to love others. That is really hard for modern people who don't seem to have enough time to love themselves. It is ironic that the smartest people like Albert Einstein believed God and practiced God's general love to others.

It is not unnatural when people are suspicious that Jesus died for us 2000 years ago, and because of the cross we are delivered from evil. In the same way, the existence of God doesn't seem to be proven scientifically. Therefore, modern people who believe science have great difficulties to believe God. How do we know that God exists in the world? If we heard this question, I'd like to ask reversely: Is it easy to say that there is no God in the world? How can you be ignorant if you dig into life itself and the well designed universe?

If you are still weak in your belief of the existence of God, I'll show you a cheat key to access God. Think reversely. You can't imagine that there is no creator. Instead of knowing God first and practicing God's love later, conversely, act God's love first, then you will know God little by little. Small practices and exercises may open the door to God and draw you a little closer to God. May the guidance and love of God be with you now and forever. Amen.

<Reflection>

(Please watch a video clip of Perseverance Rover.)

When we are thirsty, we drink water. When hungry, we eat food. When sleepy at night, we go to bed. We satisfy our necessities of thirst, hunger, and sleep. Everybody does this, and based on our actions, some psychologists may emphasize that the biggest motivation of human action is self-interest. That is not wrong and yet that isn't the golden rule. The claim that we humans are only being motivated by self-interest is the mythology of modern capitalism. Modern capitalism and the modern economic system always try to persuade us to earn more and spend more. And when you spend more, you have more, and you live big, that is, you are successful. That is illusion and myth of the mass-producing and mass-consuming society.

Certainly self-interest is one of the main factors of our actions, and it really is our main motivation; however, if we admit that self-interest is the one and only factor of human action, we know that we cannot explain the life of self-denial or self-sacrificial acts. Humans are spiritual beings who have aspects of both self-interest and self-devotion. Parents are taking care of their children, sacrificing their time and energy. Self-devotion sometimes surpasses self-interest. And the greatest human self-sacrificial act, we believe, is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. From the self-sacrificial death, we Christians learn how heavy the weight of

“love” is. Love, particularly Christian love, is not of a sweet mood or emotion but of faithful action.

The title that I chose for this reflection is “Faith and Action.” Actually I do not like this type of approach. Do we really need to explain our faith through another concept of “action”? You know that faith without action cannot be something. The word faith already includes the concept of action in it.

Like myself, I assume that the writer of 1 John probably must have shared my thought. The writer says in verse 22, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, instead of declaring “we believe in Jesus Christ.” And in the same verse it says, “we should love one another,” instead of confirming “we love one another.” Although the content of the words are about faith and love, his tone seems to be strong and adamant. Faith includes action; therefore, faith and action cannot be equivalent comparison elements. This phrase is like, “fruits and lemon.” If somebody says “fruits and lemon” we would be somewhat confused due to its awkward positioning of equivalency. So, if someone says the phrase “faith and action,” that phrase should sound weird; but it does not. Why? Because we have heard that phrase a lot. We are familiar with the approach. And we have misunderstood and misled what faith is all about. That misunderstanding is not only for us; it has a long history, and

even in the time of the writer of 1 John and even in Jesus' time, that misunderstanding prevailed.

The emphasis by the writer of 1 John is not a unique statement, but a repetitive one from the public life of Jesus. When Jesus was asked to answer the foremost commandment, in Mark chapter 12 Jesus says, "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." ³¹ The second is this, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these."¹

There is an outstanding gap between 1 John chapter 3 and Mark chapter 12; I'll explain it some day. Instead, I can say today is that the general idea that penetrates the two pericope is the same; loving God and loving neighbours. Loving God is believing God, and loving neighbours is the timely and situational responsibilities and requests. Situational responsibilities and requests indicate a smaller and detailed angle, and the timely responsibilities and requests explain larger perspectives. If a good man is helping a wounded person who fell into the hands of robbers, the good man is responding to the situational responsibilities and requests. The timely responsibilities and requests, however, come with larger perspectives; If I bring the

¹ Mark 12:30-31

case of the wounded person by robbers, the larger perspective sees it a matter of public security or a matter of redistribution of wealth in the society. Believing God, and loving neighbours in the two different levels are all connected and are inseparable.

Reflecting on the key points from 1 John chapter 3 that we've read, the inseparability of the faith to God and loving action for neighbours, what are the challenges that we Christians are confronted with in modern society?

I must attribute the problematic confrontations to atheism and egoism. Atheism has been accelerated by the name of science with the eradication of divine mystery that science cannot solve or prove. And egoism has been spurred by capitalism that has mythologized human self-interest. The mythologized capitalism has pushed many people to leave God and has standardized the modern self-centered perspectives.

Is there any clue to overcome this mythology and atheism? Do you have any key to draw us close to God? Most of all, I'd like to say, we need to recover a genuine Christian spirituality. One of the effective ways to recover Christian spirituality for today, especially for the younger generation, is to know the mystery of life, to share the mystery of the earth, and to exclaim the mystery of the universe. This is because God is to be found not

only in the Bible but also in our situations and contexts. And these Gods are inseparable.

In the beginning of my reflection today, we watched the first flight of the Perseverance Rover in Mars. The device is looking for the proof of life on Mars. Could a proof of life on Mars, such as oxygen and water, that the "Perseverance" rover of NASA is still trying to find, be a small trail that leads us to the awe and mystery of divinity? How about proofs of life on earth? Oxygen, water, four seasons, flowers, bugs, animals, birds... full of life: Can these be small clues that lead us to the awe and wonder of divinity?

Let us rest our busyness for a moment, and try to re-discover that we all are living on a miraculous, amazing, and thrilling planet, earth. We have proper gravity, so we can walk on it. We can see daffodils and we feel fresh air every moment. Does the abundant life, full of mystery, lead us to become aware of the presence of God who created and is creating all things? May the God of mystery take your hand and walk on the way of loving God and loving neighbour.