

I Will

Sermon by Brian Russo

February 13, 2011, Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill

Song of Solomon 3:1-5

Luke 24:36-43

After my last sermon, in *a pretty how town*, which admittedly was one of my more “heady” sermons, I wanted this one to be.. oh, how shall I say it.. shorter and more simple. I can almost hear a collective cheer rising up from the pews. But saying that let me also say this: “heady” sermons are just as much a part of me as they are a part of you. This congregation, indeed this pulpit, would run the risk of being reduced to ordinary theological blather if it lost all its “headiness,” so let us all be cautioned from the want of a different extreme found in simple-mindedness. Sure, that might lead to a couple more hand-waving gestures and the audible “Amen’s” you all know I love, but our beliefs would surely be deprived of the virtue obtained in a seeking-questioning faith, indeed one of the reasons for coming to this church; that, along with the greatest choral music and organ playing you ears and soul will ever hear! Now, can I get one of those Amen’s? Amen.

That preface now out of the way... I sat down this week with the ambition to write a beautiful sermon about love. Why not, right? Seemed appropriate with Valentine’s Day being tomorrow and all. Sadly however, I found myself quite inept at achieving such. Instead I’ve pretty much done the exact opposite and decided to attack it. Yes, attack it; not love, mind you, but Valentine’s Day. For I admit it: I hate it. I mean it’s just so phony. It pretends to be about love and is rather about such things like chocolates, roses, and unmentionables. And more, we all know it’s really just a Hallmark creation, a precise marketing strategy targeted at our present-day society; and trust me, they know who we are and what we’ve become. They paid watch to the changes over the last several decades and have exploited that love simply doesn’t mean as much. That “I do” is no longer “I will” – but rather “well, I do today, and that’s conditioned on just how long that day seems.” So they’ve monopolized on it and utterly have all of us, especially we of the XY chromosome by the wallets, knowing that we’ve become lazy and apathetic towards making our love seem special on the days that aren’t also designated as an occasion.

Yes, I can hear it now swimming all around your minds: Brian really does not like Valentine’s Day. No, no I don’t, and lucky for me, neither does Anya. But you know what though, I think Jesus would be pretty suspicious of it too. I mean, Jesus was all about continuity and preached that words should always be married to actions. That’s why he was always against the hypocrites. So I just really can’t see him buying into a special celebration for something that should be, and yet frequently isn’t, perpetual.

Similarly, I don’t think he would subscribe to the start-stop dance we engage in here most weeks. You know, the dance where you come to church on Sunday all spiritually energized and leave kind of the same, but then begin to lose it during the week when the machinery of routine separates the excitement from your faith? Ringing a bell? I mean, I admit it. I know I’ve danced it before. There are simply those weeks where God just goes on the backburner, right? It’s like, ‘Jesus, you’re great and all due praise is yours and everything, but I just really need a breather here. I mean, nothing personal or anything, but the thing of it is I just want tune into the Jersey Shore marathon tonight, ok? Hmm and you know what, that kind of reminds me, I got a couple of other things going on too... so you how about this JC, what if I just catch you next Sunday, alright?’

Now, I know I've made a comedy of it but does this sound like you at all? Such that your faith has become a Sunday-only affair, a start-again stop-again dance? It seems to me that for a lot of us it has. That so much of our attention goes to everything else, that when we think about even just an hour on Sunday spent in worship, we're like "well, an hour I guess isn't too bad, but if Cindy makes it go on any longer, that's really going to put the rest of the day in a foul mood." To be honest then, it just really makes me wonder if we're all so anxious to get back to everything else in our lives that we'd actually not notice if Jesus himself had returned and was right there standing in the back as we hurried out the narthex.

But lest I despair too much over that wonder, I should outwardly acknowledge that even the disciples were basically guilty of the same. For remember, Luke tells us that only a couple of days after Jesus' resurrection, his own friends, the disciples, didn't even recognize him. I mean, this was the man who they left their jobs and family to follow! This was the man who they lived with, learned under, and watched die, and even they didn't recognize him! And even when he revealed himself to them and showed them the wounds in his wrists and feet, their eyes were still devoid of recognition! They were so consumed by something else, in this case their grief over what they believed to be their Saviors death, that when the moment came and He was right there back in their presence, they disbelieved it. Wow. If the disciples couldn't notice Jesus, how could we who are 2000 years removed from his life expect to; especially with everything we have going on in our ever-so busy lives of today?

...I don't know. But what I do know is this: our chances of noticing the Divine around us would steadily increase if we were to refocus our faith such that the spark is lit on more than just Sunday's. As a loving relationship is emblazoned by fireworks going off on a closed loop, so also should be our faith. For if we are only to kindle our beliefs in this solitary hour every week, then surely the embers will amount to outnumber the flame and our spirit will inevitably blow out.

My friends, the message today is indeed simple: our shared affections should not be highlighted on just a single day and nor should our spirituality. Both need to be engaged in an ongoing affair, reawakened throughout every day in every week, such that we begin to become like the woman in the Song of Songs desperately searching to find, and when finding, never letting go of our other, our Savior.

Upon my bed at night
I sought him whom my soul loves;
I sought him, but found him not;
I called him, but he gave no answer.
'I will rise now and go about the city,
in the streets and in the squares;
I will seek him whom my soul loves.'
I sought him, but found him not.
The sentinels found me,
as they went about in the city.
'Have you seen him whom my soul loves?'
Scarcely had I passed them,
when I found him whom my soul loves.
I held him, and would not let him go
until I brought him into my mother's house,
and into the chamber of her that conceived me.
I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
by the gazelles or the wild does:
do not stir up or awaken love

until it is ready!

Are you ready? Are you ready to be woken from the slumber of life's routine? Are you ready to replace *I do* with *I will*?

Amen.