

“God’s Love...We Deliver”

I Corinthians 9:16-23 Mark 1:29-39

Scott B. Martin - February 8, 2009

Valentine’s Day is coming. Everyone from school children giving little paper valentines to classmates; to those who are dating going out on a romantic dinner; to husbands and wives taking a walk in the park; to sons and daughters calling up their parents; to those in any kind of committed loving relationship find fun way to celebrate their love; to friends going out for a drink; all will be seeking ways to express their love for another. Love always seeks a way to express it self, to embody itself, to deliver.

Naturally whole industries have arisen to help people do this. Here are just a few. In the U.S. alone 189,000,000 roses are sold for Valentine’s Day. Worldwide 1.2 billion roses are sold! Don’t want to send roses, there are always cute stuffed animals. No, then you can always give a heart shaped box of chocolates. Over 36,000,000 heart shaped boxes of chocolates will be given this week. Want something to eat, but something a bit different, how about a live lobster? No, want something more dramatic, something more humorous, something more romantic...well there are always all those singing telegram services.... Gorillagrams, singing Elvis’, singing cupids, singing hearts, cowgirlgrams and even divagrams! The possibilities are endless for ways of delivering the message that we love someone. Yes, love always seeks a way to express it self, to embody itself, to deliver.

Before we go much deeper into exploring “delivering love” lets take just a moment to touch on the prior question “Where does love come from?” Now don’t get your hopes up too much. When it comes to romantic love, neither I nor anyone else has been able to say exactly why one person falls in love with one person and not another person. Almost everyone, sooner or

later experiences the pain and frustration of loving someone who does not love us. What we can say is that for most people love is response to someone or something that is mysterious and wonderful. We are struck at the core of our being, heart, mind, soul, and strength by another. We are feel a incredible bonding. We want to be with that person, in sickness and in health, for richer, for poorer, until death do us part. Love is a response to something mysterious and wonderful. This is true when it comes to our loving relationships with other people; whether it be one of great friendship, or family ties, or romantic love. It is also true when it comes to our love of God.

Indeed, there may well be a connection between our love of God and our love for others, in all our loves permutations. Jesus certainly tied together love of God and love of neighbor in the two great commandments. Paul, as we shall see, certainly connected his love of God with love for others. Paul said that “faith, hope and love abide, but the greatest of these is love.” I John says that “God is love” and that those who say that they love God whom they can not see but hate their neighbor whom they can see, are lying.

In Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians church he says he could no more stop trying to spread the good news of Jesus Christ to others than he could live without breathing. Yes, he loved and cared for the people he was preaching to but what is very clear is that what stands behind this is Paul’s amazing Damascus Road experience of the risen Christ and the great love and grace of God that Paul experienced in that moment and continued to feel for the rest of his life. It is this love and grace that Paul wants to share with others. This is what he sought to deliver for the rest of his life.

Paul says that in service of this he continued to be a Jew for the Jews and acted like a gentile when with the gentiles. He says, **“I have become all**

things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.” (I Cor. 9:22b-23)

Critics might say Paul is being manipulative or that disingenuous. I don't believe that is the case. For Paul the love and grace of God are only nonnegotiable factors. This Paul will hang to as if his life depended on it, and he certainly felt it did. What is negotiable is the cultural trappings around in the cultural situation he found himself in. Early on Paul decided gentiles like you and I did not have to become Jews to experience the love and grace of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Paul found creative ways to deliver the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Through the centuries many forgot this. Many western missionaries went to places like Africa, India and China and spread not only the gospel but western culture as well, with the result that placed a hindrance to the gospel.

China is a good example of this. Hundreds of missionaries spent a hundred or more years in China trying to spread the gospel. We must not minimize their hardships and dedication but when they were kicked out during WWII and later by the communists they had very few converts, in part because Christ was too connected to western culture and imperialism. Today, Christianity is blossoming in China, in large part because now it is an indigenous faith, not a transplanted faith.

In the Gospel passage we find Jesus staying at Simon Peter's house. When Jesus arrives he and his disciples find that Simon Peter's mother in law is deathly ill with a fever. Jesus gets to work immediately. He **“took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.”** (Mark 1:31)

Now doesn't this seem strange? The poor woman has just gotten up out of her sick bed and she feed a whole houseful of men. The women here might just shake your heads and say, "**Typical!!!**"

I had an aunt who use to say, "Men treat themselves pretty well!" The implication being that men don't think of others, particularly their wives! This summation of men was passed on after any inconsiderate action, like the time after my uncle retired from the railroad and he came home from have an afternoon drink with friends in the local pub and found that his supper was not ready. Being a man of regular habits he became angry and demanded to know why his supper wasn't ready. If I remember right my aunt gave him a little lecture about men being able to retire and enjoy a life of leisure while women never getting to retire. This may also be the time she slammed a can of beans down on the table and said "Here's your supper!" It think it is safe to say that this is a case where neither of them found a way to deliver love, either human or divine!

Hopefully this is not what is at work in Mark's Gospel. The word "serve" in Mark's gospel is "deacon." Peter's mother in law sets about "deaconing" after Jesus heals her. As you have probably figured out, this the same word churches have for people who serve communion, visit people in the hospital and in some cases preach. We call them deacons. The early church called deacons to take care of the widows and orphans and to pray and meet the needs of the saints. We also know that women followed Jesus and the disciples and helped meet their needs and one can assume the needs of others around them, as they went about Israel spreading the good news of the kingdom of God. The gospels tells us that when Jesus was crucified it was the women who were there and it was the women who were taking spices to the tomb to anoint Jesus body, who learned that Jesus had been

raised from the dead. I think it is fair to say that Peter's mother-in-law set about deaconing as a response for Jesus healing her. Love calls for a response and love always seeks a way to deliver.

This past week one of the true saints of the church died, Millard Fuller. I had the great good fortune to meet and briefly talk with him a couple of times in my life. I also worked with him and two thousand other volunteers at the Tijuana Jimmy Carter Habitat Blitz build. Millard Fuller would have done the Apostle Paul proud with his boundless energy, his love of God and his passion to spread the kingdom of God one house at a time. Millard Fuller's life story is a love story.

From his early days as a young boy of 6 when his father gave him a pig to raise and sell Millard was a born entrepreneur. He loved working, creating a business and making money. He graduated from Auburn with a degree in economics in 1957 and went on to law school. By the time he graduated from law school, he and his business partner were already millionaires. They had started a cookbook publishing company, among others. You know the deal. Church and school groups would publish cookbooks as fundraisers and they weren't the only ones to make money.

Millard was on the fast track. He married Linda Caldwell in 1959. He bought a mansion with lots of land and cattle. Millard was working night and day making money and lots of it. He was by all accounts a very successful and happy man. Little did he know his life was about to take a far different direction.

While Millard was successful in business his marriage was falling apart. He was never home. His wife Linda threatened to leave him if things didn't change. They decided to seek out the council of Clarence Jordan at Koinonia Farm in Georgia. Jordan had created a Christian community on

the farm based on the principles from the Book of Acts were the early Christian Community had all things in common and gave to the orphans, the widows and the poor. It was there that Millard began helping to build houses for the poor.

Millard's and Linda's life would never be the same. He sold off all his business interests and the big house. He gave away all, not just some of his money. He and Linda went to Africa as missionaries with the Disciples of Christ, to build houses in the Congo in 1973.

When their term was up they came back to Koinonia to decide what was next. They had developed a passion for helping the poor have decent housing and they knew there were poor all over the world living in shacks. In 1976 they started Habitat for Humanity with the goal of wiping out poverty housing worldwide! No point having small goals! They would do this with what Millard called the "Theology of the Hammer" and following what they called "the economics of Jesus." The houses would be built by volunteers and donated money. They would be sold at cost with NO interest and house payments would be used to build more houses. Families would work on their house and their neighbor's houses putting in what became known as "sweat equity." Today Habitat is working in more than 100 countries! They have built more than 300,000 homes and housed more than 1 million people! No wonder former president Carter said of Millard, **"he was an inspiration to me, other members of our family, and an untold number of volunteers who worked side by side under his leadership."** Talk about love delivering!

As the French playwright and philosopher Jean Anouilh says, "Love is above all, the give of oneself." Love delivers. Amen.

