

Radical Love

It's not uncommon to hear people say as a matter of principle: everything in moderation. Or perhaps they might flip it and say: moderation in everything. What they mean, I think, is we should avoid any extremes at all cost.

For example, let's talk eating. We need to eat of course, to survive. But as any nutritionist or dietician will tell you, if we under eat or overeat, we can have all kinds of problems. Again, the idea is that moderation is the key in such matters. In other words, doing too little or too much of something might be wrong and even harmful, while in contrast, being moderate or seeking the middle is more likely to be right and even healthy.

I am aware that this might be a bad example at Christmastime when overeating is on our minds. We're all thinking about turkey, prime rib, pies, and of course gobs of Christmas cookies. Maybe the last thing we want to hear about is moderation. Right?

Well, the good news is we have a God who is not moderate, at least when it comes to people, when it comes to you and me. In fact, when it comes to people, when it comes to you and me, God is passionate, over the top, and radical. When it comes to people, when it comes to you and me, God's has for every one of us, what I will call radical love.

The radical love of God is in no way moderate. We can see this in the Christmas story itself. God did not create a world and create people, to moderately watch the show from afar. No way! God decided to come near us in order get involved, to be personally and radically involved in our lives.

You see, when God surveyed humankind and realized how dark and anxious our days can be, how confused and insecure we can

get about our identity and our place in this world, how many painful things we can do to each other, God decided to come and do something about it. So, after giving the Ten Commandments, after speaking through prophets, God decided to come into the world himself, to be Emmanuel, to be God with us.

Please note, however, that when God decided to come near us, to be God with us, to get personally and radically involved in our lives, God did not come to punish, frighten, scold, threaten, or any of the things that are often attributed to God. Instead, God came to tell us that we are his children, his forgiven children, and that we are truly and deeply loved by him, forever.

This is pretty radical. God left heaven, he left heaven, so he could personally tell us we are his children, and he loves us. As you might guess, this is where the baby in the manger comes into the picture, the baby Jesus, of course. It's all about the baby. And the baby is God in the flesh, living among his children, and completely and radically loving his children

I sometimes think God did it this way to make a point. After all, what is less frightening or threatening to us than a baby? What is easier for us to love than a baby? What loves us more purely than a baby? Yet, we still often picture God as one who threatens us, who comes to correct and punish us because of our sin. Let me offer you this different picture today, a picture of a God who has a radical love for his children.

A high school football player, Zaezion Dobson, died at the age of 15, five years ago on December 17th. He died in Knoxville, Tennessee, sacrificing his life to save the lives of three young girls in a random gang-related shooting spree. You see, a 23-year-old man, enraged by his mother being shot and injured, drove around his neighborhood randomly firing at people. This is where Zaezion went into action. He jumped on top of his three young friends to

shield them from gunfire. Zaezion's response to sin and evil in the world, was to save other people. Sadly, he died immediately, in this act of radical, sacrificial love.

Zaezion embodies my picture of God coming into the world to get personally involved in our lives. He came to love us and save us from all darkness and anxiousness, to save us from all sin and evil that surrounds us. The Lord saw such tragedies as happened to those three girls and to Zaezion, and he decided he had to come into the world to be near us through such times, and to save us from such times. This is what I am calling radical love.

Just like Zaezion, God comes into the world to shield us from sin and evil, but also to be near us, to be God with us, to love us as his children, as we go through our struggles, like the coronavirus pandemic, cancer and other illnesses, through our own job losses and the stress of our finances, through our own personal and family problems, through our own addictions and abuse, and through our own struggles with grief and our worry about death.

God wanted to come into the world to be personally involved in all these details and matters of our lives, the good and the hard, so that we could be encouraged by his love and saved by his presence. The Lord wanted to be Zaezion to each one us, to save us, to rescue us, today, every day. This is God's radical love for us. This is God's radical love for all people.

The fact that God appeared to shepherds first, further reveals his radical love. You see, God sent angels to shepherds, to people who were not particularly important, or for that matter loved. They were the lowest class of that society. Not only did they hardly ever go into a town like Bethlehem, but they were also not particularly wanted there either. God sent angels to these lowly people, to announce his coming into the world, to announce his love for the world, through the birth of Jesus. Is this not radical?

God's love is radical in that he loves all of us. Yet he is especially concerned for those who don't feel loved, that they hear the good news of his love. And God is especially concerned for those who regularly feel they're on the outside looking in, that they hear the good news of his love. And God is especially concerned for those who feel forgotten and wonder what the point of life is, that they hear the good news of his love.

This means however large we are in life, like kings and presidents, or however small we feel in life, like those shepherds who tonight represent all us regular people of the world, we can hear the good news that we are God's children, and he loves us. He loves us, not moderately, but sacrificially, completely, even radically.

Love is a radical thing when you think about it. For example, I am blessed that on Sunday, I will have Margo, Erin, Parker, Addison, Michael and Samantha, at home to celebrate Christmas. My love for them is not moderate, but radical. So, I would do anything for them, anything, even die for them, like Zaeveion.

So, it is with God's love, at Christmastime, and at all times. The love God has for us, his children is never moderate, but it is always extremely passionate. Moderation has no place when it comes to the love of God, because God's love as seen through Jesus in the manger, is radical love. God through Jesus would do anything for us, even die for us to save us on a cross at the age of 33. Talk about radical. But that's another story for another holiday.

And oh, by the way, go head, enjoy all your special Christmas foods tomorrow, especially those Christmas cookies. Maybe you can save the whole moderation thing for December 26th!

Merry Christmas and Amen!