

“Unintended Consequences”

If we could foresee like we hind-see, we could avoid many of our contributions to life’s unintended consequences. Those are the times and situations in which we and others impulsively or intentionally act outside the realm of morality or ethics. Then we end up with the chicken and the egg all over our faces. Bad consequences would have been avoided had we acted with integrity.

King David acted upon impulse and then intention, and the consequences plagued his family for generations. Chapters eleven and twelve of II Samuel record a time in King David’s life when he forgot who he was before God. The man whom Scripture described as “a man after God’s heart” committed adultery and murder begun in a moment of lust. As an excellent warrior and leader in battle, David understood, “If you find yourself in a hole, the first thing to do is stop digging.” But his personal life indicated that good judgment comes from experience, and a lot of that comes from bad judgment.

But God’s love reaches beyond what we do, to redeem us to become who God intends us to be. God sent the prophet Nathan to confront His beloved David with the fact and consequences of what he had done. Respecting the man and his position before God, Nathan told a story about a rich man who in arrogance and greed took the beloved and only ewe lamb of a poor man and made it a meal for a traveler. David listened and then became enraged by what he heard; but he had also forgotten what **he** had done. Caught in the net of the immorality of others, enraged David became condemned David as he heard Nathan declare, “You are the man!”

A note of precaution here: both Nathan and David - righteousness and sin - exist side by side, and stand within and represent the community of faith. The church cannot afford to read David’s story as a call simply to become Nathans, pointing the finger at and naming the sins of others. In the book, *The Predicament of the Prosperous*, the authors write, “The church is called to proclaim God’s judgment on all that opposes God’s desire for justice and fullness of life. But the church is also required to receive and acknowledge judgment for its own participation in the conditions that create brokenness.”

David faced his sin, and his God. Psalm 51 records David’s heartfelt

words of repentance and confession which have blessed generations who too have knelt before our loving God seeking mercy and a new heart. And what do we hear from the heart of God? “If with all your hearts ye truly seek Me, ye shall ever surely find Me’, thus saith our God.” Isn’t it wonderful that for the last two Sundays, Amy Yavonovich and Christyan Seay have blessed our souls powerfully singing the same theme of hearts intentionally, passionately seeking after God. David sought and was restored to integrity of heart before God.

God wants us to daily seek and find Him. God wants to give us His heart that we might experience the pure joy of being in Christ, and fulfill our calling of love and grace with one another as His witnesses in the world. In awesome love, God sent His Son - from the lineage of David - who, without sin, walked in the purity of God’s heart, was obedient in sacrificial death for all humanity, and still leads those captive to sin to victory over sin. Jesus gifts us with treasures of heaven/gifts of the Spirit for the Kingdom that enrich our individual and collective hearts to build up a body of truth and love that lives God’s story of salvation.

Like David, we are called. Like David, we are not perfect. And so God bonds us to Jesus and to one another so that the gifts of our lives will compliment each other, support each other, and make us accountable to each other. In that accountability, we come to realize that probably the biggest troublemaker we will ever have to deal with, watches us from the mirror every morning. This truth humbles us to be more patient with each other as together we strive to “become mature in our faith, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

Yet, so often in our living and in our service, we forget Christ’s fullness and our oneness! Twenty or so years ago, the church robustly sang, “We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord. We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord. And we pray that all unity may one day be restored. And they will know we are Christians by our love, by our love; yes they’ll know that we are Christians by our love.”

Really? That means we have to be truly real about first giving our lives to God and then each other. It means that the standards we profess with our mouths will be lived out in our lives. It means we must stay so close to our Lord and to one another in faith that “the devil can’t do us no harm”...cannot get between us. It means we hold fast to God’s unchanging hand and shun the devil’s tricks that bring unintended consequences.

It is very interesting that when John was on the Isle of Patmos and the

Risen Christ instructed him to write letters to the seven churches, the first

church to receive a letter was Ephesus. After commending them for their many good works, Jesus said, "I have this against you: you have forsaken your first Love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first." The first Love? God, then neighbor.

There is a high standard of individual and corporate morality by which disciples are bound to Christ and to one another in love, humility, gentleness and patience, as they keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. In Christ, "There is one body and one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all." Joined and held together by every supporting ligament, the church grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work in Christ and for Christ. *That* is the calling to which we strive to be worthy. And when we stumble, impulsively or intentionally, and cry our confession to God, Jesus comes, takes us by the hand, lifts us up, and makes us worthy to again walk in the integrity of a surrendered heart. That, dear friends, is amazing love. That minimizes those unintended consequences.

In the days of Christ's life on earth and every generation since, that which has drawn millions to God's Son is His love. For centuries, people in every circumstance in life have cried out, "Pass me not, O gentle Savior. Hear my humble cry; While on others Thou art calling, do not pass me by." Jesus reaches into hearts and, with the sunshine of His love, replaces the darkness with the light, doubt with hope, sorrow with joy, despair with gladness, fear with praise. Oh, "Come, Thou fount of every blessing; Tune my heart to sing Thy grace; Streams of mercy, never ceasing, Call for songs of loudest praise. Teach me some melodious sonnet, Sung by flaming tongues above. Praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it, mount of God's redeeming love."

What drew you and me to Christ? His love. What binds us together? His love. What gives us zeal and desire to be His witnesses to our broken world? His love. Loving God and loving each other in the world is the only way we nurture and build up the body of Christ into works that glorify God. And there are fewer church schisms where there is unity in love. There are sounds of children laughing and growing in Christ where there is unity in love. The gray-haired ones are honored for their godly wisdom where there is unity in love. This does not mean we agree in all things or even in most things. It does mean we accept, honor, appreciate, support, and are accountable to each other in the unity of Christ's love. Here, there are fewer

unintended consequences because Jesus' love defines who we are and what we do.

“This touch of love, this taste of peace, how can it last and still increase? I cannot bear to have this air of wonder cease. This happy feast, this friendly bond, how can I keep it long beyond this fleeting hour; this surge of power, this treasure found? This glow of joy, this glimpse of light, this momentary pure delight...Christ Jesus, You are what I need, the Bread and Wine on which I feed; No friend so true, no life so new---I am rich indeed. O Savior, now my spirit raise, give new direction to my ways, in all I view, in all I do, to give You praise.” (Song by Alfred Fedak).

Held in the “grip of grace” and the amazing love of Jesus, we can minimize our contribution to unintended consequences. Thanks be to God for “This Touch of Love.” Amen.