

After Easter: What's Next—and Why?

Guys, do you remember your first kiss? I'd ask the women, but I have no way of knowing how it was with your first kiss. What I remember is that I wasn't very skilled; but I was highly motivated.

Grant Teaff has been a hero of mine since I watched him play high school football at Snyder, Texas, back in the early 1950s. His mother was my Sunday School teacher, and I still have the little New Testament she gave me on some long-forgotten occasion.

Grant went on to be head football coach at Baylor University and in 1974 led the Bears to their first Southwest Conference Championship in 50 years. One of his players said of Coach Teaff, "He could motivate oatmeal."

In contrast, management consultant, Robert Townsend wrote: "You can't motivate people. That door is locked from the inside. About the best a manager can do is eliminate excuses for failure."

What you can do, says Townsend, is inspire people. Inspiration can have immediate impact; but, when the source of inspiration leaves, over time it fades. Motivation, on the other hand endures, because it comes from within.

Racial and religious hatred for centuries have motivated large populations to inhumane and terrorist behavior.

Fear and paranoia are powerful motivators.

Parental love is a motivating factor than can lead to sacrificial behavior on behalf of children.

Our scripture today says that God is motivated by Love.

JOHN 3:16-17 (NRSV) "For God so loved the world—and that little word, "so" is descriptive, rather than quantitative: "God love the world 'this way':" as opposed to "God loved the world 'this much':"—"***This is the way God loved the world***—and again, The word in the original language is cosmos, indicating not just the planet earth, but all of creation.

"This is the way God loved all of creation: he gave his only Son, in order that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. 17"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

So, God is motivated by love. Now, switch gears with me.

There's a story about a rookie airline navigator on his first flight. The plane runs into foul weather and is rocked and tossed about like a tiny boat on rough seas. Visibility is zero, and the pilot's guidance instrument is going crazy; so he calls back to the navigator asking for their position. There's a moment of silence, then the young navigator says, well, I've got good news and bad news: the bad news

is that we're lost. I don't have a clue where we are. But the good news is that we have a stiff tail wind and we're really making good time!

The obvious lesson is that if you don't know where you're headed, it makes no difference how fast you're going to get there! Or, as the ancient wisdom says, "He who aims at nothing will hit his target every time."

Imagine this: you're running late, the taxi got stuck in traffic, but finally delivers you at the door of the airport. You rush up to the ticket counter and frantically shout, "Give me a ticket, quick!"

What's the first thing the ticket agent is going to say? ("Where to?") See: you can't even get on an airplane without a goal.

So, here's the thing: motivation is totally meaningless without a purpose or a goal. God is motivated by love; but what is God's purpose? God's Goal? God's plan?

"This is the way God loved all of creation: he gave his only Son, in order that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

God loved; therefore, God gave. We've said that it is God's nature to be creative—not just to create something and be done; as creator, God is always making all things new. Today we've added that it is God's nature to love; indeed, in the first epistle of John, we learn that God IS love. And in today's text that love is manifested in giving: *"This is the way God loved all of creation: he gave..."*

Now, let's continue to peel the onion: *"...he gave his only Son, in order that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."*

Let's talk about that word, "believe." There are two ways the word, believe, is used in the New Testament, and the difference is in the preposition that accompanies it. (1) You can believe that something is true—you can mentally affirm it. The writer of the epistle of James wrote, "You believe that God is one. Good. Even the devils believe, and tremble." That kind of belief places us at the same level as the devils.

And I have a story about the other way the word "believe" is used in the New Testament. When I was in seminary I was reading through the Gospel of John—in the original Koine Greek—with Dr. Craddock. We would go around the circle, each one reading a verse in Greek, and then translating it.

We were in chapter three. I hadn't done my homework, and I was nervous. I counted ahead and was thrilled to note that I would be reading verse 16. I had memorized that verse—in English—King James Version—when I was a child.

It came my turn, and I read the Greek, and then I started the translation: "In this way God loved all of creation: he gave his only son in order that all who would believe in him..." And Dr. Craddock interrupted: "Read that last phrase again,

Mr. Robinson."

I read, "...in order that all who would believe in him..." Again, I was interrupted: "In? Mr. Robinson? What is the preposition there?"

I looked carefully, and said, "The preposition is εἰς (pronounced "ace")."

Dr. Craddock gave me that look, with one eyebrow raised, and asked, "And how is "εἰς" translated?"

I was caught. "Into," I mumbled.

"I suspect you depended too much on your childhood Sunday School memorization, and not enough on preparation. Now, translate the verse again."

I translated, "In this way God loved all of creation: he gave his only son in order that all who would believe into him would not perish but have eternal life." And we spent the remainder of the hour discussing that preposition, "into."

I have a friend who is an architectural engineer. In the early 1960s he was finishing his master's degree at Georgia Tech. All he lacked was his thesis. He had to turn in three copies, and none of them could be carbon copies. He had hired a typist, and was paying her ten cents a page to type his thesis—on a typewriter. His thesis was 150 pages long; so, that's \$450. He had a family—a wife and two small children—and their savings were getting low. They were pinching pennies.

He was working part-time at an architectural firm, and the firm was one of the first to use the newly-developed Xerox dry-process printing. He was amazed at the clarity of the print, so he took a page of his thesis and made a copy and took it to his advisor. The advisor said, "Yes, that would be acceptable."

My friend said, "I believed that Xerox had developed the future of printed communication for the next fifty years." When he tells the story, he adds. "We had \$2,000 left in our savings account. If had really believed in (or into) Xerox I would have taken \$1,000 and bought Xerox Stock."

I first heard that story in the early 80s—about twenty years after my friend's discovery of Xerox. Can you imagine what \$1000 of Xerox stock would have been worth after twenty years?

But, you see, that's the difference between believing that something is true, and believing *in* something: when you believe in something, it has an impact on your life. You behave and live in accordance with that belief. My definition of faith for years has been, "the willingness and ability to live and act as if we truly believe what we say we believe."

Easter was great: recalling the fulfillment of God's promises, celebrating God's ultimate victory over sin and death. We've been talking about maintaining

that Easter sense of anticipation and excitement—sustaining a level of spiritual energy after the glow of Easter “Alleluias” has passed. We’ve talked about how to experience on a consistent basis the energizing presence of God. The old cliché says, “If God seems far away, who moved?”

So, we’ve looked at *Who God is*, *What God does*, *When*, and *Where* we can experience God’s presence; and finally, today “Why does God do all this? We’ve said that God’s motivation is love, and that God’s purpose—God’s goal is eternal life for all who believe enough into Christ to follow him.