

How the World Will Know

1 Corinthians 14:24-25; John 13:31-35

Sunday, May 22, 2022 at the First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

- Introduction

Josh McDowell, before his conversion to Christianity, once asked a group of Christian students the central point of the Christian story and learned that it was the Resurrection of Jesus. If he could prove that to be false, he could discredit everything about Christianity. He carefully researched and published the results but failed in his attempt. In fact, by the end of his search he had concluded that the Resurrection had in fact taken place and he has spent his whole life thus far speaking for the cause of Christ. C.S. Lewis was another who desired to refute the Resurrection and ended up becoming the most reluctant convert in all of England. These are two of the most dramatic stories of faith that I know, but Scripture points out two ways that God uses to strike to the heart of people who presently don't see the point to church, and they are found in these two passages. Many people come to faith not by the way of McDowell and Lewis but by God revealing to them the thoughts of their own hearts and by people loving each other unconditionally.

- Main Point: Prophecy and love strike to the heart.

The spirit of prophecy is in 1 Corinthians 14:25.

First Corinthians 13 is the famous love chapter and 1 Corinthians 12 and 14 both speak of the gifts of the Spirit and in those chapters the Apostle Paul specifically instructs us to desire all the gifts, but particularly to prophesy. 1 Corinthians 14:25 says "But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you." I think that is when the Holy Spirit speaks through someone and touches their mind and heart of someone else in the group. This can be in a prayer meeting, during worship while the pastoral prayer or the sermon is taking place. It can take place during lectio divina. The person being used by the Spirit may not even be aware of what is happening, but somehow someone discovers that there is a God who knows our minds and take our deepest thoughts and reveals them to us. I remember that happening to a woman Jeanne and I knew back in Idaho. She went to a women's retreat and came back a different person. She discovered that God is present and involved in ways we can barely imagine, and it changed her whole worldview. It can cause a person to melt and to know that God is truly in the church.

Love of the brethren can cause people to know that God is in the church

In John 13:35, Jesus spoke to His disciples and told them to love one another, that the world would know that they were truly His disciples if they love one another. Now note that Jesus said this shortly after he washed the feet of all His disciples. Judas then left to betray Him and Peter vowed that he would die for the Lord but the Lord knew that would not happen. Peter, fearing for his life, would deny Jesus three times. Yet, Christ loved them all and served them even in His darkest moments. Jesus, after His Resurrection, restored Peter to fellowship. What He would have done with Judas Iscariot I do not know, but the Apostle Paul was just as bad and God did great things through him. The Jewish historian Josephus recorded that John considered love to be such an important topic that he spoke of it constantly. He would say over and over again, "little children, love one another."

- Application

Just as there was two points, I'd like to present two applications. First, pray that the Holy Spirit will speak, and continue to speak to the congregation and through the congregation to people. As mentioned in the tagline of another denomination, "God is still speaking." I think that is really true. Second, place great value in serving one another, even during rough times. When Jesus told His disciples to love one another, it was shortly after He performed the most menial of services, He washed their feet. Living life together and serving each other can do wonderful things to a congregation. I remember an old friend named Fred. I may have mentioned him in another sermon, but I haven't heard from him for years. He was a Vietnam War vet and he actually had fond memories of the experience. He was a jeep driver whose tour of duty ended when a sniper shattered his windshield, spraying his face with broken glass. He doesn't dwell on that. He remembers the intense friendships he had during that time. He said that there were fellow soldiers for whom he would give his life and they would do the same for him. He didn't even know their last names. Loving one another is a powerful dynamic.

- Conclusion

C.S. Lewis and Josh McDowell were once committed atheists who lost their atheism when they attempted to disprove the historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus. Many others, over the centuries, have met the Holy Spirit who revealed to them that there is a God who knows their hidden thoughts and that convinced them that God is real. Many others encountered churches in which people loved and served each other habitually and in that they saw a love that led them to a new life. Those are two ways that the Bible says people in the world will know that God is in the midst of His people.

Do Lectio Divina on John 17:20-26