

Comments by Kylee Rudkin. Comments by Gene Mace. My comments are in red.

TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

IHOP BIBLE STUDY

Topic: Matthew 3: 1 to 4: 11 “Instructions and test time”

The gospel of Matthew’s message is powerful and relevant to our current human situation. Matthew’s purpose is to give us a training manual for teaching the Deeply Satisfied Life. This material is developed for the early church, but is applicable for us today. Matthew’s teaching role model is Jesus. The “Deeply Satisfied Life” is the experience (“Gut Trip Analysis”) of the term Sanctification (which is an Old Christian Code Word understood as “Head Trip Analysis”).

This is our second lesson in this series, and is associated with “Preparing The Teacher.” My reflections on the gospel give us the overall title of “**The Training Manual For Teaching The Transparent Sanctified Life.**” With this metaphor established, let us continue. .

- I. **Read the assigned reading at one time.**
- II. **Conduct a little research on John The Baptizer.** Use your own study resources, or the Internet. Share with us what you find.
- III. **Chapter 3: 3** The use of Isaiah 40: 3 is interesting. Beginning with the 40th chapter, we are reminded this is 2nd Isaiah. 1 Isaiah is written before Judah is exiled to Babylonia (Iraq). 2 Isaiah is written after this exile as a promised return to the Holy Land.

It is important to recall the importance of the prophet Isaiah to Jesus and his ministry. You’ll recall that Jesus chooses the Isaiah scroll to announce his ministry to the Jews.

All this is in deference to the prophet Jeremiah whose purpose is to announce to the Jews that the reason for their punishment to Exile is due to their disobedience to the 10 Commandments. *Jeremiah’s call is to more faithfulness.* The position of Jeremiah is later picked up by the Pharisees.

Isaiah’s explanation of this punishment to Exile is due to their disobedience *to the mission* God gave them to share God’s love with the whole world! An interesting observation is that God achieved Isaiah’s purpose anyway. While the Jews were in Exile they maintained their traditions and faithfulness as a demonstration to “the world” of God’s love. Go figure!

IV. The lessons of John the Baptizer for Jesus his student.

1st lesson:

The need for “confession of sins.” (3: 6). Do some research on “confession,” and on “sin.” Helpful material on our understanding of “sin” is in my book “Old Christian Code Words.” As you explore this topic, force yourself to look at your experience of these words. Your references give you “Head Trip Analysis.” Run these definitions through your “Gut Trip Analysis.” Share some of your insights with us.

Confession of sins: *My sense of this is that we are being called to face ourselves quite squarely and honestly. It is rather like in psychotherapy. If we are to effectively deal with our life's problems we must first begin by facing what is there within us. It is rather like working on a car. You have to know what is happening before you set about fixing it. A lot of confessions I have heard sound more like bragging about how bad someone was before they changed their modes of functioning. To me that is not confession but grandstanding. There is real value in genuine confession in that it accepts responsibility for who we are. However, we have to have a sense that we are loved even in our failures. Only then can we face who we are. At times I have*

seen confession as a means of trying to justify our failures and even make them seem like virtues. That is quite counterproductive. Another thing about confession is that it has a positive dynamic in being a statement of what we stand for. *Confession involves what we are leaving as well as what we are going toward.*

Obviously I am a neophyte when it comes to psychological reflection. Your responses appear to be a fairly comprehensive analysis of the Confession of Sins. From my perspective, as a local-church theologian, confession of sin happens as we raise into consciousness the ways in which we prevent At-One-Ment. The purpose of being human is to experience living in harmony, agreement, to be in-tune, to experience contentment with neighbor, self and God who is The Perfect At-One-Ment. (This fulfills the New Commandment.) Anything that results in driving us apart from this At-One-Ment is the antithesis of our human purpose and can be considered SIN.

Paul Tillich notes that "Sin equals separation plus guilt." Further, he notes that if we do not feel guilty about this state of being separated, we are deceiving ourselves. Of course, Tillich is writing at the time when psychology first became a tool for theological reflection. Gene, how well I remember this early exposure to the psychological approach in seminary at Perkins!

Confession of our human state of being is the acknowledgment of our human situation (Wesley's term). Our human predicament (Wesley's term) is we can do nothing to restore ourselves to unity. Hence, we are totally dependent on the Grace Of God; i.e., in "Gut Trip Analysis" this means to open our eyes to our restoration as human beings that is already ours to have. It is only necessary for us to accept it. (Tillich: "To accept the fact we are already accepted!")

2nd lesson:

The need for "baptism" (3: 6b). Recall our recent work in the Gospel of John. What is the human experience of baptism, and what is achieved because of baptism? Share some of your insights with us

Baptism is like a kind of rebirth. You go into it as you are and come out renewed because you show in your baptism that you choose to be in the family of God. It is much more complicated than that, but basically it is a way that you can join the Christian family. I don't remember my baptism because I was too little when it happened. I'm happy that you were too little to remember your baptism, because baptism is a Gift from God. Just as friends and family brought you baby gifts, probably you do not remember these gifts either. However, they represented their love for you. It is not necessary that you remember, but that you learn to accept your baptism. Yes, baptism is the way in which we are clothed with the uniform of our faith. The league to which we belong is the Universal Team of Jesus Christ. The Uniform, and our particular logo, represents the denominational team to which you belong. The best definition I have of Baptism is that it is an awakening event in which we literally and physically die to this world, and when we are raised up out of this watery grave, we are new creatures whose eyes are opened to this reality. As we grow up, our spiritual eyes are opened more and more. This is the purpose of the churches educational ministry.

I see baptism as a way of *witnessing to something* that is part of our being. Sometimes that is something that has always been there. Sometimes it *expresses something* that has happened new. Both have significant value

depending upon the person and her/his background and basic personality. The main thing I see about baptism is that it is a way of socializing this part of our being. *It is a result rather than an event that happens upon the person.*

Well, Gene, you're on to something, but what is it? Anybody want to help him? From my perspective, this "something" is the awakening from our human predicament that John Wesley embraced as his "warm heart experience." Recently, I've talked about this something as my SECRET GARDEN that is the experience of wholeness, authenticity, the experience of being a genuine human being. This is the experience of being At-One with the environment, neighbor, self and Perfect At-One-Ment. The Secret Garden is the "Gut Trip Analysis" of the Kingdom of God.

3rd lesson:

In 3: 7b, what is the "wrath" from which we are to flee? Keep your ruminations experience oriented. Share some of your insights with us.

I try to avoid all kinds of wrath because I am generally a people pleaser and can't stand to have people mad at me. I like to live in my little harmonious world with no conflicts of any sort, but that doesn't always work out for me. I suspect that this verse refers to something a little more extreme. Some people would say that it is "the Judgment" but I don't know what I would say. Well, Kylee, you're getting after it. Keep pushing on your experience of "wrath." How does it make you feel? How does it make you feel to avoid "wrath?"

The wrath from which we are to flee: This is a phrase that tends to chill my soul. Use of "wrath" has too many negative emotional reactions to me. However, I see this saying that there are many negative things that we really need to avoid. Maybe to avoid those negatives is to "flee from the wrath". However, I think this is so predicated upon a despotic monarch which was TWLI then. It sort of reminds me of growing up as a child when much of the discipline was expression of the anger of my parents more than a concern for me in the situation in which I had done something wrong. As a parent I have tried not to let that be the case in my relationship with my children. However, I did have those times when I was angry with my kids for what they did as though it were something done against me. *I don't think we have to flee from God's wrath. I see God in a much different perspective. I see God as a truly concerned parent whose will is benevolence rather than punitive.*

Gene, of course, you are right on here. Wrath is a word that needs massaging. As much as Beverly dislikes this illustration, always it is appropriate. You see Beverly is the Wrath of God in my life. When I get to acting in inhuman or in-human ways (being hateful and angry) Beverly calls me back to full humanity. In effect she says, "Salmon, wake up! No one likes you in this condition." Then, she stands there while I kill the messenger with a flood of inappropriate words.

My experience of this that Beverly loves me so much she is willing to call me back to being a full human being I am. She loves me so much, she is willing to stand the storm in order to call me back to full humanness. Now, this is real love. This is the experience of The Wrath of God.

My experience of the Wrath of God is that God doesn't do anything. What we experience we do to ourselves. My summary statement for this is "The reward for the deed is found in the deed itself." We do hurtful things (anti-

At-One-Ment); the reward is the experience of our in-humanity. We do helpful/healthful things (At-One-Ment); the reward is the experience of fuller humanness.

God's "wrath" is the expression of God's love as Perfect At-One-Ment.

Gene, the only place I'd push your thinking is on the nature of God. The danger we have in the 21st century is the objectification of our Old Christian Code Words. God is not an object to be studied. Rather, God is the human experience of At-One-Ment. After you've read my book on "Our Old Christian Code Words," you'll have a better grasp on where I'm coming from.

4th lesson:

What is the "good fruit" we are commanded to be? Share some of your insights with us.

I think we should be carriers of God's love and goodness. When we use our words and actions to build others up or to help in the ways that we can, and avoid things that separate us from others, then I think we are good fruit. Fruit is healthy and nourishing so we should be like that. **Amen, sister! Amen.**

The good fruit in my opinion is to live life to the fullest that we can. This is not to try everything we can get ourselves into. It is to live it to the very most of love, being and living. *It involves a contentment with what happens.*

Ah, yes. The Secret Garden. aka: The experience of the Kingdom of God.

5th lesson:

What is the lesson to be learned concerning 3: 11b, "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire?"

hmm...I am not sure but it is fun to think about. Maybe it means that we will be baptized by the spirit of God (holy spirit) and maybe the fire reference means that it will be more extreme. What do you think Pastor Bill? My experience of Water is that it is kind of mysterious and that you have to have water to live whether you understand exactly how it works or why it works. It doesn't really scare me though. My experience of fire is that it is also mysterious and I am kind of afraid of it. In small carefully controlled amounts it is not quite as scary. I also know that it consumes what it touches. Hmm.. maybe it is like that song says "our God, He is a consuming fire." That kind of makes sense. **You are moving in the right direction. It is helpful to remember that Bible words are metaphors. Fire represents passion! "I'm on fire for the Lord!" To be baptized by the Holy Spirit means to be awakened (baptism) and given our Freedom (the Holy Spirit.) The Holy Spirit always mean "freedom."**

Baptizing with the Holy Spirit and Fire: My Nazarene background leaves me with a lot of negatives about those words. They were like words from Polly the Parrot that sounded big but had no meaning. They were the expectation of people who were saved and sanctified. Unfortunately, I have not yet overcome those emotional responses as yet. Maybe someday.

Speaking of the Role of Confession. Do you recall your statement:
"Confession involves what we are leaving as well as what we are going toward." Thanks for the self-revelation. Truly, it is refreshing. Something for you to "move toward"—When the Holy Spirit and Fire are objectified as something to be studied, then our childhood experiences are the result of "Head Trip Analysis." Your testimony is a demonstration of the self-destructive nature of such objectification. However, in terms of our EXPERIENCE as "Gut Trip Analysis," there is a revelation, or awakening, that leads us to the sense of "contentment" you speak of in the previous paragraph.

"Baptism" is the EXPERIENCE of AWAKENMENT to the reality that God is love. This love is experienced as At-One-Ment. "The Holy Spirit" is a "Head Trip Word." Yet, when it is EXPERIENCED the word is transformed. Now, it is experienced as OUR FREEDOM. In this way, we experience the Holy Spirit as Good News.

"The Good News of the Gospel" cannot change life's circumstances. All humans live oppressed; we live in the jails of life's circumstances. **WHAT THE GOOD NEWS CAN CHANGE IS US!** It is true we are victimized, but the Good News is we have a choice to be **VICTIMS** or to be **VICTORS**. **MY FREEDOM IS NOT DEPENDENT ON LIFE'S CIRCUMSTANCES. MY FREEDOM IS DEPENDENT ON THE RELATIONSHIP I CHOOSE TO TAKE TO LIFE'S CIRCUMSTANCES!**

I AM FREE! Do you hear the Good News in this?

Please keep sharing with me what you experience! This is crucial to understand your experiences, and to better clarify how to explore this gospel using "Gut Trip Analysis."