

Some years ago, I accompanied a group of people from our church on a reconstruction mission to Hyde County, North Carolina, where our parishioners were able to replace the siding on a house, and put a new roof on another home destroyed by Hurricane Irene, in August of 2011. We slept in a converted gymnasium, in a dormitory divided into cubicles. At night the snoring sounded something like the brass section of an out-of-tune symphony orchestra. I couldn't help noticing that the pastors of the various mission teams who were there snored the loudest – except of course for me. I can honestly say that I've never heard myself snore loudly a single time!☺ On the last day of our week, one of our team members confided to me, "Well, on this mission trip I've learned that I have to respect Jesus if, for no other reason, that he was a much better carpenter than I'll ever be!" That started me to thinking: what are the attributes that Jesus has passed onto us as "Christians," a word which when it was used in the early church meant "the little Christs"? What is the key thing that Christians are "abilitated" to do through Christ's presence in us that truly marks us as His? To answer that question, I need to talk about another trip, and a different kind of symphony.



Aftermath of Hurricane Irene along Cape Hatteras (August 2011) where our Mission Team worked

During the Christmas holidays of 2008/2009, Donna and I visited the cradle of American civilization, the epicenter of American culture, the heartbeat of American social reflection. Yes, over the Christmas break that year, we went to... Disneyworld.

For me, the most memorable attraction was the 3D film called "Mickey Mouse's Philharmagic." At this Disneyworld attraction, you walk into a charming little movie theatre, they give you these special glasses to wear, and soon Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck are zooming around your head chasing run-away instruments of the symphony orchestra. The images are so 3-dimensional, so life-like, so close to you that your natural inclination is to reach out and caress Mickey's ears, or pinch Donald on his cute little duck butt. But of course, you can't. Human beings aren't designed to touch light with their fingers. Or are they?

The blood sacrifices the ancient Jews performed before Jesus came into this world – the sacrifices that the Law required in the Old Testament to atone for sin, those Old Testament sacrifices produced only a shadow, a faint reflection of the freedom from sin that God desires for His people.

In the scope of redemptive history the law laid down to Moses on Mt. Sinai, and the sacrifices that Law prescribed to the ancient Jews were really only a dim holograph of the complete and astonishing atonement God had already planned out for His children with the first Easter morning. Because, the kind of freedom from sin and brokenness, the sort freedom that God wants for you and me, the freedom that we've been talking about for a good while now, that sort of freedom has nothing to do with half measures. It's not a more-or-less free, it's not a "sort-a free" man or woman that God wants each of us to be. No, the freedom that The Lord wants for each of His children is a freedom from sin and shame and past mistakes, a freedom that is so awesome, so pure that we are – as His Word says – we are washed whiter than snow. We have been so forgiven, so set free in this kind of God-given freedom that, just like the Bible says, our past life of mistakes and broken dreams are removed from us, the dirt and shame of our past is taken away from us as far as the East if from the West. That's the kind of wondrous new beginning we are all given with the blood of the Cross. That's the kind of incredible freedom you and I are given with the Resurrection of The Christ.

But – and here’s the kicker – left to our own feeble, human persons, you and I are incredibly ill-suited to grasp that kind of freedom for ourselves. Trying to put that kind of freedom into the human person, trying to grasp, and hold onto, and take in that kind of freedom is like trying to put an aircraft carrier in a duck pond. If you and I tried to grasp and hold onto that kind of freedom and enjoy it from a purely physical, earthly, human perspective...well, we might as well try to catch light with our finger-tips. But, thanks-be-to-God, with Easter morning the universe has been shifted on its axis. You may recall that in the Crucifixion, when Jesus breathed His last on the Cross and gave up the Ghost, the Temple Veil in Jerusalem was torn in two, from top to bottom. With this act, God was making such an elegant statement to His children.

You see, with the tearing apart of the Temple Veil, this wall that separated the people from the Divine Presence was no more. With this act, God removed the barrier between His people and the Holy of Holies. When Jesus finished His agony on the Cross, at that moment God finally tore down that wall between Himself and us that had been there ever since the Fall of man. This was reformation of all life on a celestial scale. Because of the power in the love and atonement of Jesus Christ on the Cross, mankind need no longer be separated by his fallen-ness from the saving Grace of God. That is the power the love of Jesus gives. It can change the universe, and it did. But it also changes you and me. And **that** is the really awesome, staggering power of Godly love. Now you and I are set free to love one another with nothing less than the same love that Christ shared with us. This is, in fact the real central focus of the Great Commandment, to love one another **as Christ himself loved us**. And because of the miracle of the empty Cross, now you and I can do just that – love one another with nothing less than the love of Jesus. And that, dear people, is what it means to be truly, joyously, completely free. Because it is this perfect freedom about which Jesus talks to us this morning in his new commandment. That perfect freedom is ours to celebrate, when we really do love one another with the love of Christ. (See Jn. 13:34)

And once the love of Christ is received in the heart of the believer, that person can love those around him with a no-holds-barred, all-in, take no prisoners kind of love. It that kind of love can indeed move a mountainside. This staggeringly powerful love in the heart of the redeemed man or woman must surely be what Paul was talking about when he wrote to his amazing prayer for his beloved Ephesians:

“...I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” 20 Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine,²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever.” (Eph.3:14-21 – NRSV)



It’s a wondrous thing, the power in the love of Jesus. By the power in the love of Jesus, we are made fishers of men. By the power in the love of Jesus we testify to the healing of people – mind, body and Spirit. By the power in the love of Jesus, we are called to witness the transformation of people from the merely physical, to that combination of Spiritual and physical children of God who, for a time are just a little lower than the angels, and who are fearfully and wonderfully made. By the power in the love of Jesus, yes, we **are** able to touch light with our fingers, to hold God-light in our hands, and to pass it on to others. The power in the love of Jesus: What an amazing thing. Yes indeed, it’s true; they will know we are Christians by **His** love.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen. JWB+ 4-1-16