

**Quark**  
**“Boil it down and do it.”**  
**Mark 12:28-34**

First in the series, *Xtreme Love: lessons from the Methodist heart*

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**What's Good?**

My father once told me about an encounter he had at the beginning of a work day. He was on his way to work and needed to stop for gas; so he pulled into his usual service station. It was in the days before self-serve gasoline in Michigan, so an attendant walked out in the chill of the morning and strolled up to my dad's window. He didn't say anything; so Dad opened the conversation. "Good morning!" he greeted him. The service station attendant just looked at him for a moment, a frown on his face, and then replied with a question: "What's good about it?"

I said, "Good morning" to you, and perhaps that's a question you thought of, too. In fact, what *is* good about it?

We have cards attached to the Friendship Folders we pass around each Sunday, on which you are invited to suggest worship themes that would address your real questions. On it, one of you last week said sometime we should focus on the state of our economy and world affairs. If you want to know if something's got our attention these days, that's probably it. Loans to auto credit companies notwithstanding, it's hard to have much confidence in the economy these days. It's still not certain whether our auto companies are going to survive this financial perfect storm. Nobody's job is absolutely secure. Most of us are getting pretty cautious and, unless you lived during the Great Depression of the '30's, our spending patterns are affected like never before in our lifetime. Even for our church, the year-end summary is dismal, with a deficit of about \$50,000 to end last year and a budget that is currently \$100,000 more than we currently expect. Good morning? Like the man asked, "What's good about it?"

The world situation doesn't look very good these days either. There's a massive cholera outbreak in Zimbabwe, where there is already an HIV-AIDS pandemic, famine

and near anarchy under an out-of-touch despot who once was thought to be the hope of Africa. Congo and Sudan are still arenas of terrible violence where it seems no one is safe. Israel is engaged in an all-out war with Hamas and Gaza is aflame; Pakistan is moving troops away from the mountains along Afghanistan where terrorists are pinned down to the Indian border where tensions are mounting in the aftermath of last month's attacks in Mumbai. And a Russian professor's theory that the United States is going to break up in the next year or so is now being taken seriously, at least over there. Good morning? Indeed, what is good about it?

### Thesis

I think Jesus would say the same thing today that he said in the face of a world that was no less depressed and dangerous as ours. *God* is what's good about it. God was what's good about it all along and God always will be no matter what.

One day he was debating with Pharisees and scribes, which was not really out of the ordinary for a rabbi who was trying to teach a lesson. But this debate was a bit different in that those who questioned Jesus were pretty upset about his teaching and were, by this time, out to entirely discredit him as a teacher and a prophet. Then one scribe who had come to like Jesus' answers asked him the question I think goes along with, "What's good about it?" He asked, "What's the most important thing?"<sup>1</sup>

This is what Jesus said, "Hear O Israel, the Lord your God is One; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." This wasn't anything new. It can be found in the Book of Deuteronomy, the heart of Jewish belief. They all wrote it on a scroll and kept a copy of it on their door post so they'd always remember it. The most important thing is your relationship with God, the heart of your faith. If you don't have that, you don't have anything. If you do have it, though, it is everything. With this relationship, you can look in the face of oppression, the burden of financial failure, the threat of an illness, or anything else that makes this *not a good day* and still have everything you need for it to be a good day. That's what he was saying.

Then he added another dimension, and he wasn't the first to say this, either: He said, "And the second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" Love God and put this love into practice by loving others and you have the whole picture. This is the simple yet ultimate endeavor that could change the world from one of economic disaster

and violence to a world of abundance and peace: love God and love others. The scribe liked what he heard and added that this is more important than any act of worship that could be performed in Temple, synagogue, or church.

That's the key. If you were to investigate the heart of Methodism from its very beginning you'd find that this is what our 18<sup>th</sup> Century founder John Wesley had tapped into. The love of God, at home in your heart and let loose in the world, is the fundamental key to dealing with life.

Connection with God, the most fundamental element of life, is what's good about today. I'll put it another way. The Greek scientist-philosopher Democritus theorized the existence of the atom, the basic element of life. Physicists have had a two-millennium field day ever since: exploring and discovering and theorizing what the a-tom is. Once it was thought that everything was made up of air, wind, water, and fire. Then, molecules were understood and more elements discovered. With the discovery of the atom, scientists thought they had found the basic building block of all matter. Yet, with more theory and the invention of the electron microscope, particulate matter was discovered: protons and neutrons and electrons which make up the atom; these, then were thought to be the smallest bits of what makes up everything. But now, physicists are certain that they have discovered something smaller still: quarks. Three quarks make up a proton or a neutron, and so-on.<sup>2</sup>

For all the forms of worship, all the laws and rules we follow, all the practices of mission and education we conduct: the quark of the new life Jesus brings is loving God and with that love, loving others. That's what you get when you boil it all down. So John Wesley said what he heard Jesus say: *just boil it down and do it*. From that beginning, he taught three simple rules: do no harm, do all the good you can, and endeavor to stay in love with God. These are the General Rules of the People called Methodist by which we have been called to live since the 1740's.<sup>3</sup>

And we can because Jesus was born to make God's Kingdom available: a new life of abundance and peace made possible right here and right now. God's love, at home in our hearts and let loose in the world: when you boil it all down, this is fundamentally what the church has to be about.

### **Boil it Down and Get it Said**

So, Dad was at the service station greeting the attendant with his “Good morning!” and the guy just frowned and asked him, “What’s good about it?” You know what my father said? He told me he just smiled and said, “I’m *here!*” and the sour attendant couldn’t help but smile.

You and I can look at the sour world in the face and say, “I’m *here* with some compassion, and God’s here with all the power of redeeming love: that’s what’s good about it.” If we really do our job with an attitude and a mission that fundamentally loves God and loves people, we just might see a smile come across the world’s face. We just might be on our way in changing the world the way Jesus had in mind.

### **References**

- [1] PHEME PERKINS, “The Gospel According to Mark”, *The New Interpreters Bible Commentary*, vol. VIII. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. © 1995. pp 677-679.
- [2] LEON LEDERMAN, *The God Particle*. New York, NY: Dell Publishing (A Delta Book). © 1993. p 50.
- [3] JOHN WESLEY, “The General Rules of the People Called Methodist”. These may be found in the 2004 Discipline of the United Methodist Church. Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House. © 2004. pp