

Ephesians 5:1-20

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

But fornication and impurity of any kind, or greed, must not even be mentioned among you, as is proper among saints. Entirely out of place is obscene, silly, and vulgar talk; but instead, let there be thanksgiving. Be sure of this, that no fornicator or impure person, or one who is greedy (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be associated with them.

For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light.

Therefore it says,

'Sleeper, awake!

Rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.'

Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts,

giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Wake Up and Be Awesome

Living in the time of COVID drastically changed many of our routines. In the early days of the pandemic, when we were strongly encouraged to stay home and limit our exposure to others, many of us may have found ourselves doing things to occupy our time that we normally wouldn't do. I admit, at the beginning, I had big dreams of finally getting my house organized the way I wanted, going for long walks with the dogs, and being as productive as I could possibly be. I wanted each and every day, to wake up and be awesome.

But my couch was really comfortable. And my dogs are older now, so they're just as content to waste the day away sleeping on the couch as I was reading obsessively or binge watching some of my favorite television shows on Netflix. Which is how I found myself sucked into the television drama *Scandal* once again. The title describes the seven season series perfectly. Olivia Pope is the "fixer" of Washington, and she and her team set out to help seemingly innocent people clear their records and set the news stories straight. Olivia finds herself in the midst of a terrible scandal, one involving the president and his best friend, and then later at the hands of the evil spy organization B6-13, of which her dad was the director, only to long for the light. She and her sometimes boyfriend Jake eventually want to step into the light together. They want to wake up from the slumber of darkness, scandal, and the evil-doings of Washington and step into the light of doing good in the world. But the world wins. Rather than waking up and

stepping into the light of good living, Olivia constantly finds herself stuck in the rut of worldly living.

This fictional television show is not that far from the truth of our world. Peterson points out that our text today offers us two resurrection practices that are central to our faith: love and worship. But the world as we know it would tell us otherwise. The world as we know it would tell us that love and worship are futile against what is really wrong today. Love and worship, according to society, are not going to overcome the darkness of this world. Peterson writes:

It is a world in which neither love nor worship has a high profile of credibility. To love and worship in contemporary America—and it was no different in ancient Ephesus and Rome and Athens—is to be dismissed by the culture to a dustbin of irrelevance. Love and worship are all well and good if all you want to do is take care of your soul. But if you want to make a difference in the world, bring prosperity to the poor, bring peace to the nations, bring food to the hungry, bring healing to the sick, bring health to the environment, forget about love and worship as ways of getting things done. If you are serious about doing something about what's wrong with the world, you must adopt ways that have a proven track record, do something that *works*, something that is effective.

Peterson goes on to outline the approved means of doing good in the world, according to the “powers that be.” Those would be education, technology, propaganda, legislation, money, and as a last resort, war. I’m not, and I don’t think Peterson is either, suggesting that things like

education and technology and legislation, even money, can't be used to promote peace and improve our world. But I think, in fact I know, that if these things aren't rooted in love and worship, then they become quick-fixes to deep rooted issues.

Peterson points out how war language infiltrates our society: we fight cancer and fight for freedom; we launch wars on drugs, wars on poverty, wars for peace. This doesn't sound very awesome to me.

Our first two verses of chapter five beg to offer a contradiction to our society's teachings about what love and worship can do. We are told to watch what God does, and love like God loves. *The Message* interprets these verses beautifully:

Watch what God does, and then you do it, like children who learn proper behavior from their parents. Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that.

This is a world over-turning love, friends. This is awesome love. Paul tells us, quite clearly, to wake up, and love like Christ loves us. This isn't a cautious, tip-toe kind of love, but an audacious, shining, life-changing love. This isn't a self-serving love, but a love devoted to worship. As we practice resurrection, we are given two clear practices from chapter five: love and worship.

But we can't ignore Paul's words of caution: We must be careful not to let this awesome God-like love turn to trivial, lustful love. *The Message* tells us:

Don't allow love to turn into lust, setting off a downhill slide into sexual promiscuity, filthy practices, or bullying greed. Though some tongues just love the taste of gossip, those who follow Jesus have better uses for language than that. Don't talk dirty or silly. That kind of talk doesn't fit our style.

Thanksgiving is our dialect.

Thanksgiving is our dialect. Love is our language.

Grateful love is a love that shines, friends.

Peterson points out in *Practicing Resurrection* that society has dimmed the light of what love actually is. He goes so far as to state that it is perhaps the most over-used word in the English language. I confess I'm guilty of it too. We say things like, "I love that show," or "I love that dress," or "I love the Red Sox, even when they're having a bad year." Do we really? I think too often we proclaim "love" for what we "like." Paul cautions us against this pretty clearly. In this consumeristic society that pushes goods, gossip, and grandeur down our throats, Paul warns us to wake up from the slumber, and love like Christ loves. A love that is infused with worship. A love that is agape love—love in action.

Contrary to what the world teaches us, if we actively love, and allow active love to guide our thoughts, words, and deeds, we don't have to "fight" drugs, poverty, hunger, or "fight" for peace. When we grow up, when we wake up and decide to be awesome and God-like, we can really and truly step into the light and let love win.

My good friends Vicki and David Moore at Rahab's Rope really live into this agape love. In fact, Rahab's Rope's slogan is "love in action." Even in the midst of a pandemic, the Rahab's Rope staff is able to shine love on women in really dark places. They recently shared this story on their Facebook page:

Multiple days each week our staff travel across the city to work in a home where rescued women are held until their court date. We cannot imagine what they have experienced or their mindset. The average age a girl is trafficked in India is 9 years old, in this home most are in their 20's. Sometimes it takes years for a case to come before the court. Things seem hopeless, going from one trapped place to another. The staff of Rahab's Rope provides love and care through literacy, sewing and life skill classes. This week we opened class with a fun game, followed by a Bible story and time to counsel with each girl. We concluded the class by letting the girls share their thoughts on the most important personal values. Remember their background and that they have experienced abuse we could never imagine. Their profound thoughts:

Always tell the truth. Do not destroy property. Have courage. Keep your promises. Do not cheat. Treat others as you want to be treated. Do not judge. Be dependable.

They would not have learned these values in the world from where they came. These values come from the constant and consistent pouring out of our staff into these girls each week.

Vicki and David and their staff believe that pouring love on these women makes a real difference. But it's not just

words, it's action—teaching, listening, praying, and counseling, to help them overcome extreme obstacles. That's agape-love, friends.

The Irish poet William Butler Yeats wrote his much-quoted poem "The Second-Coming" in 1919 in prophetic response to a world raging with hate and bloody with war. It was a world impressively educated, highly technologized, relatively prosperous, and he watched as it sank into lies and violence. He wrote:

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned.

It would have been easy for Yeats, even for us, to put love and worship at the periphery of our lives in light of the enormity of corruption in his world, and ours today. And yet, a month after Yeats had written "The Second Coming," his daughter Anne was born into this dark and gloomy world. Three years later he wrote another poem, "A Prayer for My Daughter." In this prayer, Yeats writes:

Considering that, all hatred driven hence,
The soul recovers radical innocence
And learns at last that it is self-delighting,
Self-appeasing, self-affrighting,
And that its own sweet will is Heaven's will;
She can, though every face should scowl
And every windy quarter howl
Or every bellows burst, be happy still.

Lust, greed, bullying, and hate cannot shine, friends. The light that we are called to shine is one that shines in the

broken places. A light that we cultivate by practicing agape love and a life of worship. A light that we don't find anywhere else but in Christ. So wake up and be awesome, and let your light shine. Amen.