

Sermon
May 3, 2015
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If you were God..... I mean, put yourself in God's place... if you were God before the beginning of time, before the creation of man... existing in absolute perfection and total peace, with no problems of any kind, having always been and always will be.... why in the world would you feel the need to create ANYTHING? I mean, why bother? What could you possibly want that you don't already have? And, for heaven's sake, why would you create something as worrisome as humans.

Now, if I were God... If I were God before the beginning of time and I had an urge to create humans. My humans would never make mistakes. The words 'selfish', and 'devious' would never be spoken because, well, such things simply wouldn't exist. And here's what I'd really do different. I would never put that tree in the garden of Eden in the first place. No choices for my humans. No choices means no mistakes. I would create people to be perfect and sinless.

But God, on the other hand ...went right ahead and created us just the way we are, with a drive to love, that part is in His image, but also with a real hankering for trouble. He gave us the choice to leave Him, and to hurt each other. He gave us the choice to unleash destruction on all of the beauty He had created for us. Butthat's what makes God God, and makes me, well, just a human. But what was He thinking?

Fact of the matter is, I believe, that God, at His very center, at the very eye of the hurricane that is His being, possesses a magnificent, overwhelming power to love. It's a characteristic so essential that today's lesson, John I 4:16 makes the simplest of statements, "God is love." But just owning this awesome power to love is perhaps not entirely satisfying to God. He wants someone TO love. He wants a loving relationship. A characteristic is just potential until it is put into action and achieves it's full bloom. I may have a great ear and a terrific sense of rhythm and own a trombone, but unless I play it there will be no music, only the silence of potential.

But if God created us so that He could express His infinite and awesome love, and created us with ability to love and know Him in return, why did he also gift us with choice? Why didn't he create us flawlessly programmed to love Him in return. Given choice, we are free to turn against Him.... free to

break His heart. Again, what was he thinking?

Well, here's how it might work. Love is a gift we give. Any relationship, whether it's friendship, kindness, charity or compassion, whether the recipient is someone close or, a child in Renk Town.... any relationship must be freely entered into by us or it can't be a loving relationship. Without choice our behavior, no matter how perfectly executed is just some sort of contractual arrangement.

An example, a true story... My husband Harlie and I once had a perfect arrangement with Thomas. It was flawless, and perfectly executed, but it was not a relationship. It actually felt really weird, and we were kind of relieved when it ended. Let me tell you about it.

When we first got married, a few years back, we went to London and ended up staying in a small, rather 'posh', boutique hotel near the queen's mews, where her majesty's carriages and horses are kept. Quite near the palace, actually. Now how the likes of us should turn up in such a place is an altogether other story which I'll tell some other time.

But anyway, although the hotel had only eight rooms, there was a fully liveried doorman on the outside of the front door. He held the door for us, it's what door men do, and bowed slightly as we lurched our jet-lagged American bodies over the threshold, only to be ever so graciously greeted on the other side of the front door by a lovely young woman, the concierge. She was dressed in a perfectly tailored black suit, freshly shined black pumps, with her blond hair was pulled back in a twist without one hair hanging loose. And it was 6:00 in the morning! Now, as a result of extraordinarily early arrival, our room wouldn't be ready for an hour, but, she smiled slightly, would we enjoy a nice breakfast in the library? 'Whoa, that would be fan-ta-stic!' I thought, but I said, 'That would be quite nice, thank you.' because I was working on speaking English.

She rang a little bell on the wall, to summon Thomas, our butler. Not just the butler, our butler. He was tall, and young and handsome and was dressed in a dove gray tuxedo. And it was 6:30 in the morning! As he led us to the library, he told us that he would see to our needs while we were there, and that we should just let him know if he could be of service. I assumed this was just courtesy talk, but what he meant by, 'just let me know if I can be of service' was, 'Please, please, please let me know how I can be of service.'

Over the next three days, we learned what perfect attention could be, and we were the targets. I can't

figure how Thomas did it, but the boy could move about without being heard, anticipating our every move. Never directly in our line of sight, discreet, polite, non-intrusive, he was always, always there in his impeccable tux to swoop in and pick up a dropped key, hold out a tray of tiny sandwiches, or ask if we might need an umbrella.

Now Harlie and I had scored a bottle of free champagne on the airplane. I had mentioned to the stewardess that we were on our honeymoon, and it was a leftover at the end of the flight. We never saw champagne while caged in our tiny seats with our knees up under our chins for 14 hours, so it must have been a first class thing. At the hotel that first evening, I popped it out of my carryon, put it on the dresser and told Harlie that I would go in search of a champagne bucket to chill it. I opened the door to go out, and headed toward me in his dove gray tux, I'm not kidding, was Thomas carrying a silver champagne container filled with ice. "I thought you might be needing this."

This went on for three days, and when it was time to leave we said goodbye, and he said, bowing slightly said goodbye also. It had been a perfect, flawless performance of roles on both our parts. But, here's the important part. It was NOT a relationship. He never asked how Harlie and I met, and we knew not to ask if he was a student. He didn't ask if I was catching a cold or whether my puffy eyes were just jet lag. We mentally noted his long hours, but didn't ask if he was tired, and urge him to "take a load off" and join us for breakfast.

Most importantly, though, we didn't share our stories, didn't share our lives, our fears, or our dreams for the future. Ours was a perfect contractual arrangement, because once he accepted the post and was paid, he had no choice no free will as it were, as to how he should relate to us. It was all quite literally by some book. All of his exquisite attention to our needs was not offered out of love, but out of a preset box of rules for correct behavior. He never knew us and we never knew him. We were humans responding to each other, without error, by the rules, but without relationship. And It felt weird.

The first morning after our return home, I entirely forgot that Harlie had asked me to wake him at 7:00, burned the toast and broke the yolk in the eggs I was frying. He sat down for breakfast. and I walked around behind him, put my arms around his neck and kissed him on the thinning spot on the top of his head. He looked up at me and we started to laugh. We laughed because that was a perfect, perfect morning.

God created us not to be error-free, not programmed to pay flawless attention to him, and not to live by a preset inviolable plan. He created us so that we could choose to love him, choose to know him and above all choose to live in a living, breathing, changing relationship with Him.

That verse I read earlier, John I 4:16 reads in its entirety, 'So we have known and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in them'

But what happens if, in our busy lives we simply forget about God or in our free will we dust our hands and walk away from the relationship? What happens then? Well, what happens is sooo much more than we deserve. God waits. He waits with open arms. He waits for us to come to Him, with head bowed, asking to be forgiven so that he can fold us once again into His love, building a healed relationship that will grow from now into eternity. How much does God love us? John 3:16, 'For God so loved the world that world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.'