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December 29, 2024

Scripture: Luke 2: 21-40

Sermon: Given to God

Prayer...

Introduction:

Henri Nouwen's friend Fred, who was a secular person, wanted him to write a book for secular folks. Fred said to Henri,

“Speak to us about the deepest yearning of our hearts, about our many wishes, about hope; not about the many strategies for survival, but about trust; not about new methods of satisfying our emotional needs, but about love. Speak to us about a vision larger than our changing perspective and about a voice deeper than the clamorings of our mass media. Yes, speak to us about...God.”

Henri's first chapter where he summarizes his main message to Fred and his secular friends.

“Fred, all I want to say to you is “You are the beloved,” and all I hope is that you can hear these words as spoken to you with all the tenderness and force that love can hold. My only desire is to make these words reverberate in every corner of your being—“You are the Beloved.”

I love Henri’s words to Fred about being the beloved. This certainly is the key truth that we all must embrace about ourselves.

If I was asked to write to help awaken secular people to a spiritual worldview, I would probably follow Henri Nouwen’s example and write a book about love. I would suggest that as a Christian I choose a spiritual worldview over a secular worldview. I might highlight a few key ideas that might distinguish a spiritual worldview from a secular worldview. For example:

1. A Spiritual Worldview would center on the reality that God is real and that God is love. I would share that within all of God's creation is the presence of God, therefore we do not need to look far to see the reality of God. God is everywhere and God is within us.
2. Based on this spiritual worldview, I would make the bold conclusion that a secular world does not actually exist. A secular world assumes God is not real or at least not knowable and that human beings together frame what is true and good. A spiritual worldview believes that the world centers in God and God's presence of love. Therefore everything in the world is spiritual. To assume the world is secular is to suggest that there are parts of the world where God is not active and where God is not Lord. Instead, I agree with the theologian Abraham Kuyper, who said,

‘There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry: ‘Mine!’”

Friends, God does not look at the world and call it secular. God call all of it, Mine.

What we need particularly in Western societies, is an awareness of the reality of God and God’s presence in creation. This is what indigenous people have always known, but what many people from Western European culture have forgotten.

Dallas Willard, a well known spirituality writer and a former Philosophy Professor at the University of Southern California during his lifetime sought to articulate and Intellectual Philosophy that honored faith in God, but he often was challenged by people claiming that a secular worldview that discounted God’s existence was a superior philosophy.

In many ways we are at a turning point in the world today. I actually think that a spiritual worldview will ultimately overtake a secular worldview in society but we need more people in our world to stand up for God's existence and for the message that God is active within her creation.

3. A third key idea of a Spiritual Worldview is that love is the essence or the purpose of life. Therefore what is deepest in our nature as human beings and all of creation is love. Love is our deepest desire and when we act in love, we live into our purpose. We need more people who believe that love is stronger than hate and peace is stronger than violence. We need a spiritual perspective that looks for common values across religions and other spiritual perspectives rather than an attitude of competition between different faith perspectives. A Spiritual worldview is also kind to those who identify as atheist or agnostic. We offer our worldview not as a debate with those

who do not believe in God, but as a thoughtful idea which is intended to cultivate further conversation and relationship. We have much to learn from our atheistic and agnostic friends even as we seek to share with them the message of God's reality and God's love.

Up to this point in my message, you notice that I have not mentioned our Scripture story. Now I am ready to make the connection with the story of Jesus being given to God in the temple and the idea of a spiritual worldview.

Do you notice that in our story today, Anna, Simeon, Mary, Joseph, the priest, and Jesus himself are all modeling what it is like to live in a spiritual way.

Anna and Simeon are elders in the Jewish faith who have eyes to see that Jesus is the coming Messiah. They have a spiritual worldview.

They are in tune with the Holy Spirit and therefore are aware when Jesus shows up. They are spiritual people who are led by the Holy Spirit to bless Jesus and bring encouragement to Mary and Joseph. Anna and Simeon also show that people who are older still have significant purpose. In this case these two are anointed by the Holy Spirit to speak words of blessing and prophecy over Jesus and his parents. I think this is probably the most important role for anyone who is of an older generation. For those of us who are getting older, we are called to empower young people to fulfill their life callings and we are to tell the story of God's love, so that faith and courage may be born in the young.

Notice in this story that Mary and Joseph also are spiritual people who are giving Jesus to God. They are dedicating Jesus to God for God's purposes in Jesus' life. This is what spiritual young people are invited to do. The young are to give their own lives over to God and young parents are to dedicate their children to serve God. Spiritual

people entrust their children to God and seek to raise them to have a spiritual worldview.

Now I understand that there are many competing ideas in our world.

We are to engage the world with a heart of kindness and compassion rather than with a spirit of aggression. In the end love is the greatest message we are to share in our world. When the church fails to show love, we lead people astray and a secular worldview becomes attractive. When the church or other faiths demonstrate love then the truth of God may be known and the fullness of human potential as spiritual beings called to reveal divine love may be fully experienced.

Let us give our lives over to God in the same way that Jesus was offered in the temple. May we embody God's love in such a way that those who are living in a secular worldview might be aware that God



is love, that they are made in the image of God, and that they are the beloved.

AMEN.

Luke 2:21-40

21 When the eighth day came, it was time to circumcise the child,[a] and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

22 When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord

23 (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”), 24 and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah.[b] 27 Guided by the Spirit, Simeon[c] came into the temple, and when the parents brought in

the child Jesus to do for him what was customary under the law, 28

Simeon[d] took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

29 “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,

according to your word,

30 for my eyes have seen your salvation,

31 which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

32 a light for revelation to the gentiles

and for glory to your people Israel.”

33 And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was

being said about him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to his

mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of

many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed 35 so that the

inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce

your own soul, too.”

36 There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day. 38 At that moment she came and began to praise God and to speak about the child[e] to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

39 When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. 40 The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, and the favor of God was upon him.