

1 Peter 2:2-10  
You Are What You Love  
November 3, 2019  
Rev. Lou Nyiri

Last Sunday, Rev. Wright opened our eyes to the concept of “seculosity.” Seculosity, Rev. Wright taught us, comes from David Zahl’s book by the same name, which highlights for us how society (of which we are a part) often turns toward secular means for satisfying deep longings – affirmation, love, purpose, and meaning (to name a few).

While the church once helped fill the void by speaking into the din of the surrounding world with a voice:

- which at times functioned like a still small voice reminding and recalling God’s declaration that you are loved & created in the image of God
- that through the Holy Spirit’s power re-forms us time-and-time again into the people we were created to be
- which counter-forms us away from the world’s sirens call seeking to form us in ways which ultimately feel less like our hearts true home and more like “cracked cisterns” that cannot hold water – to recall Rev. Wright’s astute use of the prophet Jeremiah’s call in Jeremiah 2.1-11.

Whereas the church may once have had a voice in the conversation and while it may appear that more and more people look outside the church for answers to deep longings.

What would you do, if I told you,

1. The church still has a voice in this conversation (even though it may be muffled & buried in the recesses of our minds)? [cf. Romans 12:1-2, “don’t let world squeeze you into it’s mold.”]
2. If you discover you may have fallen prey to “seculosity” it may not really be your fault?
3. Finally, once you see it you can never unsee it – that when we begin to understand this, it has the power to become as I recently heard, *Like the movie The Matrix starring Keanu Reeves*, in that, “Once you see it the 1s and 0s fall away and become the woman in the red dress.”

The disclaimer: *If you are worried what we talk about this morning might change your life and cause you to re-evaluate your existence and your particular perspective on faith’s journey, then now, might be the time, to feign the coughing spell and step out for a drink of water until we get to Communion.*

### **No coughs?**

I invite you, then, to take a walk with me for a moment into a cathedral. Before we step through the door, I’ll ask that you to take off your everyday glasses and put on a pair of awareness glasses that we might see what is transpiring around us in this grand religious space.

As we enter, notice the sheer popularity of this place. It is filled with pilgrims from the surrounding area who have made their way to this site to discover hospitality and companionship of fellow travelers on this faithful journey toward fulfillment. We enter the sanctuary through a narthex which opens to reveal vaulted ceilings; as look around this atrium we see flowing flags, banners, colors, symbols, and images adorning the space which call us into the current festal season. This space allows us to both soak in a sense of vertical, transcendent openness while shutting out a distracting horizontal, mundane world.

It feels like home – we can catch our breath in this space as we get our bearings and become oriented to the various spiritual offerings around us – if we are a new seeker, we might consult the map or stop by the information area to discern this labyrinth’s layout and where we might find our ritual observance site. We are invited to lose ourselves in this space and wander away from the goal-oriented ways we inhabit in the “outside” world. This worship site though feels different – yet familiar – it harkens back to medieval cathedrals – mammoth religious spaces that can absorb all kinds of different religious activities all at one time.

We can see it – as we look around the winding labyrinth of this religious site – our investigative eyes notice that emanating from the center of this mecca are spokes lined with chapels devoted to various saints. We wander with contemplative prayer seeking what our hearts long for – what we love – that which will bring fulfillment to our deep, deep hunger. As we enter one of these side chapels, we are struck by the rich iconography that lines the walls of this interior space. We are inspired by three-dimensional icons adorned in such a way that we desire to be imitators of such exemplars of “the good life.”

As we enter, we are greeted by a welcoming acolyte who offers to shepherd us through the experience and who has wisdom to also allow us to explore on our own terms. We are not sure we want anything in here, yet we are open to being surprised. We are unsure yet expectant, believing that what we need might be in here. Then it happens - we are moved – in the very core of our being – to desire this vision – we are called to adorn ourselves in such a way that we to will embody this portrait of “the good life” to the watching world. We are overwhelmed by this rich, embodied visual gospel of “the good life” that we are evangelized and converted.

Having discovered the object of our worship, we proceed to the altar to find the priest who presides over religious transactions for we know in this place we are invited to give and to receive. We leave a donation, receive a priestly benediction and leave with our devotion & desire fulfilled. That is until we pass by a disciple exiting another side chapel and discover their vision of the good life would go a lot better with the outfit, I’m planning to wear Friday night.

By now, I’m guessing, you’ve discovered that I’m not talking about a real “church” – rather, I’m using the concept of “religious site” to highlight the embodied practices of the local mall. It also highlights how easily we can become drawn into what Rev. Wright spoke about last Sunday, what David Zahl calls “seculosity,” – what James K.A. Smith (the Christian philosopher from whom I adopted this mall illustration) calls secular liturgies.

Smith believes that we are not primarily moved by what we think, rather, we are moved through embodied actions (what he calls liturgies [formative practices]) – these practices move us viscerally (often unknowingly) in what Smith refers to as *kardia* / our heart. Smith would not discount the life of the mind – recall he is a Christian philosopher – rather he is saying that while what we think is important – what we think is not what motivates or moves us – at least not initially. We are not so much thinking beings – as much as we like to think of ourselves as thinkers – we are not moved primarily in a Descartes-ian “I think therefore I am” type of way – we don’t typically think then act – usually what happens is we are moved by something then we think – we are moved to tears in a movie or when we hear a song...we laugh at a sit-com – then we reflect on it *what made me cry? What made me laugh? Where did that tap into my deepest sense of self?* – from this then we begin to formulate in our minds what we hold to be important in life (what we would call our worldview).

Those visceral hits are important for they prompt us to ask deeply formative questions like “Why am I so moved?” That visceral hit signals to us that we engage with our world as an embodied people who are moved first on an affective level – one which shapes our desires. One, which left unchecked, can take us into realms of desire which do not meet our deepest needs. As Johnny Lee sang, we find ourselves, “looking for love in all the wrong places.” Yet, long before Johnny Lee crooned these lyrics, Augustine of Hippo wrote in his *Confessions*, “Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.”

We were created to love. We seek to be loved, to love and to find our hearts deepest desires fulfilled by what we love. However, the rub is that we often love things more than the people around us...maybe even more than the God who created & loves us...our love is mid-directed. Now, as faithful people, we can attribute this to sin. However, keep it in mind that sin does not turn off our desire to love it merely mis-directs our aim. We begin to pursue what we think will bring us ultimate peace and find what we love is not necessarily what ultimately fulfills our deepest longings. And this isn’t actually a bad thing, because the very fact that we long for something to fulfill us – even if that something isn’t the ultimate thing – the very fact that we desire shows us that we seek love. Which brings us back to Johnny Lee & St. Augustine *our mis-directed search for love* reveals time-and-time again “Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in [God].”

So, recalling how liturgies are *formative practices* which grab hold of our hearts and move us to some understanding of “the good life” – we can see how easily our loves become mis-directed – corporations spend big money to move us toward consumption as fulfillment – in a 2006 NPR *Marketplace* segment – a marketing professor comments, “Be aware of your environment, if you don’t want to be manipulated by it.” This is an apt observation of how we begin to define the object of our love – *the goal is to become aware of the formative, liturgical nature of our environment in order to recognize it as such, and thus resist its formations.*’ [p. 95, [Desiring the Kingdom](#), James K.A. Smith, Baker Academic, 2009]

Part of our Christian story's good news is that God doesn't simply declare or explain love in a way that we understand it cerebrally – rather, God embodies love, (that's incarnation, "God in the flesh"). God fleshes out great, sacrificial love for us by becoming one of us!

Which brings us to the Christian's greatest formative liturgical practice – worship.

Worship is a formative practice which moves us – in the heart – toward God's greatest love – Jesus the Christ!

Historically, Christian worship is fundamentally formative because it directs our hearts through our bodies (which in turn restores our minds).

Jesus does it with disciples when he brings us to this table.

*Do this in remembrance of me*

- is not a call to formulate a 12-point sermon consisting of three – three-point movements – neatly wrapped in a nice mnemonic bow.
- it is bread broken – cup partaken.

Worship's ritual becomes the formative practices which lead us into fulfilled & fulfilling lifestyles.

Before systematic theologies and worldviews can be articulated, they are downloaded into us via a full-bodied faith experience – singing hymns & psalms, saying prayers, reciting creeds, confession & pardon, celebrating Communion & Baptism, sharing life-together [to quote Dietrich Bonhoeffer] – these are the stuff of Christian faith which help us become a people marked by a desire for God's coming kingdom [& a people who work to bring about that kingdom].

It is a desire that not only fulfills us, it also constitutes us as a peculiar people in the present. In the words of 1 Peter, we are:

“...a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that [we] may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light. [For] once [we] were not a people, but now [we] are God's people; once [we] had not received mercy, but now [we] have received mercy.”

We need to be reminded that other loyalties are constantly competing for our allegiance – and that – as the body of Christ – the body through which Christ looks compassion on this world [to quote Teresa of Avila] – our love aim differs from the world around us.

One story, then a question, and I'll be done.

In the film, *The Moulin Rouge*, at the turn of the twentieth century, we find a starving artist named “Christian” who rejecting the bourgeois lifestyle of his father, pursues a life devoted to literature and drama, all in the pursuit of beauty. If you recall the story, then you know it is a love story revolving around a play within the play – a production of another love story, “Spectacular, Spectacular.” “Christian” falls in love with “Satine” who is concerned primarily with acquisition, as attested in her hymn, *Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend*.

“Satine” rejects “Christian’s” naïve commitment to love. However, he eventually captures her heart and a transformed “Satine” rejects the duke’s lucrative offer – her desire for acquisition gives way to a passion for love and beauty.

Love shapes their view of the world, as indicated in their anthem, *Come What May*:  
Never knew I could feel like this, like I’ve never seen the sky before.

Suddenly the world seems such a perfect place  
Suddenly it moves with such a perfect grace  
Suddenly my life doesn't seem such a waste

It all revolves around you

In watching a dress rehearsal of the play, the duke (who is funding the play) rejects the ending: it doesn’t make any sense that the courtesan would choose the “penniless sitar player” over the affluent “security” of the maharaja.

Why on earth would someone make such an absurd choice?

For love, is Christian’s answer. [Smith, [Desiring the Kingdom](#), p. 78ff]

And now, the question, *what do you love?*

Amen & Amen.