

September 29, 2019

“A Divine Spark”

John Wesley United Methodist Church

1 Thessalonians 5:11; Colossians 3:16

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I want to begin today with a question posed by United Methodist Bishop Robert Schanse. He writes, “There’s an interesting contradiction that puzzles many sociologists and psychologists. Since World War II we’ve faced a time of unprecedented prosperity in our country. No period in history has ever been more richly blessed with material well-being, technology, progress in healthcare, speed of transportation, ease of communication. We have more choices, more options, and more mobility, than at any time in the history of humankind. (Here’s his question.) And yet, why have we not been happier? Why have nearly all the measures of contentedness, connection and having a sense of meaning and purpose in our life, actually declined?”¹ Something is obviously wrong. What is it? Well, I think it has to do with what St. Augustine said: “Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee.” You see, we were made in God’s image, so there is a divine spark within us. And unless we connect with the divine – with God, our hearts, our lives, will be restless. Isn’t it true that often, with all the issues, pressures, schedules, concerns, frustrations we have to deal with, we feel there’s something missing? Well, there is. Because when we don’t connect with the One who created us, the One who loves us without condition, the One who wants the best for us, we rob ourselves of the contentedness, the peace, the joy, the meaning and purpose, the love that God wants to give us in this life. The problem is, instead of staying connected to God, we have disassociated God from so many areas of our lives.

And consequently, we have a society in which so many either don’t know God, or worse, have a misconception about God. I want to share with you a short video clip from an old but very popular movie *Bruce Almighty*, starring Jim Carrey. Bruce is a restless soul. God is nowhere in his life except as someone to blame for his problems. He’s selfish and discontented with life, he causes all kinds of grief for other people, he loses his job, and then he loses the love of his life, his girlfriend Grace. We see him questioning God, distrustful of God, and angry with God. And God, played by Morgan Freeman, continually tries to connect with Bruce, even giving Bruce God’s powers for a short while. And Bruce even messes that up by using the good things God has given him for selfish purposes. But finally Bruce comes to the realization that God has it right after all. And what Bruce really wants is a relationship with God where he gives his life to God. Let’s watch. (Clip from *Bruce Almighty*.) No,

¹ *Five Practices of Fruitful Living*, Robert Schanse

somebody up there must love you! Because God has said to each and every one of us – “You are precious in my sight and I love you.”

Now just think – if secular Hollywood can convey in a movie that being connected to God brings about a deeper love and understanding of others, brings about a sense of peace and acceptance for life’s circumstances, brings about an inexpressible joy in seeing the world through God’s eyes, then just think of what could happen in real life – your life.

And that’s what we are going to talk about this morning. Together. Kind of like a giant Bible Study. As we heard in our scripture, we are to encourage and build each other up, and teach and instruct each other, so we’re going to have a discussion today. To give everyone the opportunity to share, to learn from one another, to help each other along our faith journey.

So the first question I want to ask you is – and stop and think for just a minute:

- 1) How would you answer Bishop Schnase? With all the advancements we’ve achieved, and conveniences we have, why are we not happier? We have an opioid crises, suicides rates have risen, 30% of millennials are lonely.
- 2) Who is God to you? How do you understand God? How would you define God? Has your understanding of God changed? How? Why?

These questions are important because your answers will tell you if the God of your understanding is a God you can love. Do you want to connect, have a relationship with your God?

- 3) Why do we need God?
- 4) To go a little farther – How does God deal with us? Is God active in our lives?
- 5) What role do we play? How do you look at prayer?
- 6) What are some reasons you, or people you know, don’t necessarily want to connect with God?
- 7) What brings you to this place? Maybe for the first time. What is the draw?
- 8) Think back a minute - when have you felt closest and most connected to God? Where did that divine spark suddenly warm your heart? How did you feel?

Well I want to thank everyone for participating – for your answers, your thoughts. For reminding each other why it is so important to stay connected with God. Because we do have the greatest power, the greatest love, the greatest wisdom, the greatest peace right there waiting for us. All we need to do is

connect to it. Being connected to God will put your restless heart at rest, and will fill it with meaning and purpose and contentment, regardless of what life throws at you. And so I have a final question for you – this time, you don't have to answer – it's between you and God. What is one thing you will do to grow that divine spark into a flame in your life? Because, I can assure you - somebody up there loves you!