

Smoky Mountain Reflections *August 2014 #150*

So why the “#150” in this title? Well, I decided to start numbering my reflection articles and I began writing a monthly article about 14 years ago. If I were counting, this would be article #168 but I missed a few months over the past 14 years so this is actually article #152. I decided to start at #150 now though, because I can :-). The rest of this year will have a month and a # and starting in 2015 articles will be numbered only.

So what shall I reflect on in #150? Let's tackle tolerance, love, and marriage, shall we? These are light topics! First let me say "thanks for the tolerance" to all those enlightened, tolerant individuals who accuse the pro-life, pro-traditional-family movement of being hateful and bigoted while trying to force us to accept and fund the results of following their precepts of a non-traditional, non-biblical lifestyle. You know what funding I am talking about; they want to use your tax and healthcare premiums to pay for medications to deal with the epidemic disease of pregnancy, to "terminate unwanted pregnancies" (murder innocent unborn children). Yes I know pregnancy is not a disease but they want to treat it as one.

These are political issues, but they are also moral issues and the church cannot stand silently by and politely nod when innocent helpless people are being murdered. How did we become a society so bent on sacrificing our children on the altar of materialism and success? It is simple, we are all selfish sinful human beings, that is why Christ had to suffer and die on the cross. Maybe if we look at this through the lens of love, with Christ's help, we can find a better way. The English language falls short on defining love. We only have one word for it and a lot of meaning has to be carried in the context. The Greek language, on the other hand, has four words for love: *filos* (brotherly love), *eros* (physical love), *storge* (familial love), and *agapa* (unconditional love). Notice none of these definitions speak of feelings, they are all about relationships and how we function within those relationships. In Saint Paul's famous "love chapter" to the Church at Corinth, we get some great insights on love. He tells us what it *is* and what it is *not*. First, he tells us that love is not smooth-talking, prophetic, wise, or appearing to have faith, or appearing to be self-sacrificial, because without love all of these actions are only one thing, self-serving. Without faith, forgiveness, and love, all of our actions center on ourselves. And if self-service is at the source of anything we do, it is without love and therefore only a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal; equal to nothing, gaining nothing.

God-pleasing love on the other hand, is selfless and it is made so by Christ's redeeming death on the cross. True love can be patient and kind because it selflessly desires to serve the one to whom patience and kindness is given. Love does not envy or boast and is not arrogant or rude, because it desires to serve selflessly the one to whom the honor or deference is given. Love does not insist on its own way, because it enjoys the object of one's love having their way. Love is not irritable or resentful, because it enjoys being pleasing and pleasant toward others. Love does not rejoice at wrongdoing, because that means someone who is loved is being harmed. Love rejoices with the truth, because truth is where the Gospel is found. Forgiveness is the glue that binds all God pleasing relationships and is where the peace that surpasses all human understanding is found.

A recent study published in the AFA journal noted that today's young adults have a number of enlightened prerequisites for getting married. Our young people did not think these things up. Society instilled these values in them. Here are some of those prerequisites: 24% purchase a home; 33% pay for a wedding; 50% have 1 to 2 years of full time work under their belts; 51% have a career underway; 90% finish education; and 91% be financially independent. Had I applied that last one I would: still be a single man and would have missed out on over 31 years of marriage to my best friend; would burn with passion in a violation of the 10th commandment sort of way; and three of my favorite people would not exist. Maybe getting married at the age of 21 is too young in the opinion of many, but I say that all of the above prerequisites can be worked on much better if you have a life mate at your side to work on them with.

With God's help we can provide the kind of love that bears all things, believes all things, hopes in all things, and endures all things, because true selfless love is connected to the gospel. We know this because of these three little words in Paul's letter, "love never ends." If love is eternal it can only flow from an eternal source, and there is only one eternal being. The omnipresent triune God is the only possible source for a love

that never dies. In marriage, in accordance with God's design, we get a little glimpse of what the pre-sin creation must have been like.

I pray that your summer is blessed with true tolerance and true love, living out your God-given role in whatever kind of family you are a part of, while holding up the Biblical model for the family as the anchor in our society for the selfless commitment of a married couple to each other and to the children they are blessed to raise.

In Christ,
Pastor Portier