

A Bucket of Cold Water

August 31, 2014

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Bob Goff, a lawyer, activist, philanthropist, relief worker and author of the book, *Love Does*, tells the story of when he was a high school junior and his life was beginning to slip off the rails. He had grown disillusioned with the life before and around him and had decided at the age of 16 to chart another course. It meant leaving home and starting over hopefully in the wilds of Yosemite National Park where he hoped to get back to nature, work a low-income job and escape from the realities of life. On the way out of town he decided to stop by the home of a guy who was a youth worker in town with whom he had drawn close. The guy's name was Randy and Randy was in his mid-20's and had come alongside Bob as he struggled during his high school years. He stopped by Randy's house to say good-bye and thanks. When Randy came to the door and heard Bob's story he asked Bob if he would stay put for a second while he checked on something. A couple minutes he reappeared at the door with a tattered backpack on his shoulder and said to Bob – "I'm with you." And what he meant was that he was going with him. And so they got into Bob's jalopy of a car and off they went to the wilds of Yosemite. To make a long story short, after they arrived in Yosemite, despite the companionship and encouragement of his friend Randy the youth worker who reminded him time and time again that he was "with him", things did not go as young Bob had hoped. His inspired plan wasn't coming together. The money did not last as long as he hoped, the job he was certain he would get never got offered, the tent he assumed would be his home for weeks and months got old and cramped – and young Bob realized one morning after many, many days of this experiment that maybe he should go back home and reenter high school. He broke the

news to Randy and Randy said, "Are you sure? Because whatever you do, I'm with you." "I'm sure," the young man said and they headed back home. When they got back to town and to Randy's house young Bob followed Randy into his home and saw in the family room scattered about newly opened gifts. Was it someone's birthday? the young man wondered. And just as he wondered out from the back of the house came bounding a young woman who threw her arms around Randy and welcomed him home. It was his new bride. The gifts were their newly opened wedding gifts. This woman was the woman he had married just the week before Bob had shown up on the doorstep. And with that a new reality crashed in on Bob – that this youth worker and follower of Jesus had in moment's time decided to spend the first week of his married life not with his new bride but with a young man desperately trying to find himself. Writes Mr. Goff:

What I learned from Randy changed my view permanently about what it meant to have a friendship with Jesus. I learned that faith isn't about knowing all of the right stuff or obeying a list of rules. It's something more, something more costly because it involves being present and making a sacrifice. Perhaps that's why Jesus is sometimes called Immanuel – "God with us". I think that's what God had in mind, for Jesus to be present, to just be with us. It's also what He has in mind for us when it comes to other people.

"Let love be genuine", writes the apostle Paul. "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."

Last week we talked about the author of those words, the apostle Paul, as a man who had his mind changed. A man firmly established in his own opinion and position – by God's grace and by the ministry of the Church – had his mind taken from the rigidity of his Pharisaic worldview to this incredible 180 degree renewal of the mind – in order to see that faith was not about knowing all the right stuff and obeying a list of rules – but that there was this new reality of agape love. Let love be genuine. This is life. Let love be genuine. Let love be the real deal. Let love not be a nice thought,

or a distant aspiration, or something you plan to get to when you retire – let love be the real deal. Let love be something you do.

Maybe this got emblazoned in Paul's mind when right after his Damascus Road experience – hearing the voice, getting knocked off his horse – maybe this got etched indelibly in his mind when blinded by the light he was taken by his fellow travelers on into Damascus and ushered into a home where he sat blind and unable to eat. Maybe something happened to the Pharisee when a knock came to the door and they told him that the one standing at the door, one name Ananias, was a follower of Jesus who had come to lay hands on him for his healing. Excuse me? I was coming to lay hands on him. Am I not the enemy? Have we not disagreed vehemently to the point of death? Does he not realize that I've got papers for his arrest in my briefcase? Perhaps, they said. But he just wants to sit with you. He just wants to anoint you. He just wants to come alongside of you. He's got with him this bucket of water by which he wishes to baptize you. And Luke tells us that the disciples of Damascus sat with Saul for days. Maybe that is what was etched in Paul's mind when he wrote to the Romans let love be genuine.

Or maybe it was the time days later after the disciples helped Paul escape from Damascus by lowering him over the city wall in a basket and shuffling him off to Jerusalem where he met the apostles there – but the apostles were skeptical and afraid and wondered if this was a trap – but Luke tells us again that one named Barnabas – the son of encouragement – stood alongside of Paul when public opinion was swinging against him – and vouched for him and said to the frightened apostles – that he had seen the Lord and had already begun to tell the good news. Let love be genuine.

And who's to know what stories it brought to mind among the apostles of all those times when Jesus did the unexpected. All those times when he seemed to reach across the divides that nobody else was interested in reaching over – all those divides erected by the conforming world—and showed to them what authentic love looked like. You remember the stories. When he sat at the well and talked about the living water with the Samaritan woman standing there with her empty bucket.

I got water for that bucket, Jesus said. How is it that you a Jew can be talking to me a woman from Samaria? Let love be genuine.

Or the woman deemed unclean by the law due to her twelve years of menstrual bleeding, reaches out to Jesus and touches him which of course makes him unclean too – but it is by this unclean touching that she is made well. Let love be genuine.

Or that poor Gentile woman who just wants Jesus to heal her sick daughter. Oh but I can't Jesus says. You got to be a Jew. You got to be on our side. Oh for heaven's sake says the desperate mother. We're talking about a human being here, rabbi. Doesn't your God care about human beings? And at the risk of certain charges of heresy – Jesus reaches across the divide and says, "Your faith in the God who cares about human beings has made your daughter well."

Let love be genuine.

And how could they have forgotten that night when literally all hell was breaking loose – and Jesus was gathered with his disciples in the upper room and he realizes that everything is starting to unravel. The three years of gospel preaching and disciple teaching – it's all coming undone by denial and betrayal and abandonment. And John the Gospel writer tells us that the Father had put all things into his hands. All power had been given to him. I don't know about you, but if I'm sitting with a bunch of measly and weasly disciples who I know are about to pull the plug on me – and I've been given the power and permission to do whatever I want – I am thinking justice. I am thinking of giving what's coming to them. I am thinking about saying, I've had enough.

But John tells us that Jesus, having loved his own who were in the world, loved them to the end – took a bucket of water and a towel ... and proceeded to wash their feet. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. He took a bucket of water and washed their feet. Where's the justice? Where's the discipline? Where's what's coming to them? Where's the setting them straight? Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. He took a bucket of water and washed their feet. Let love be genuine.

If you have been anywhere close to social media over the last few weeks you have been hearing about buckets. Folks from around the world have been responding to the Ice Bucket Challenge. The Ice Bucket Challenge is a fund raising idea that got started actually over a year ago, first as a way to raise money for cancer research. It wasn't until last month when golfer Chris Kennedy dumped a bucket of ice water over his head and challenged over the pages of Facebook his cousin whose husband has ALS – Lou Gehrig's Disease – to do the same as a way of waking people up to the need for help in researching the disease and finding a cure. The rule is if you dump a bucket of ice water over your head then you only have to donate \$25 to the ALS Association and if you don't – you have to donate \$100. I got challenged a couple weeks ago by my good friend Rick Howell – so I dumped my bucket of ice water over myself and donated my \$100 in honor of our dear Church of the Palms friend Joan Pagano, my high school teacher Jim Martin and my college classmate Chris Russo – all of whom are contending with ALS. The Ice Bucket Challenge has become an overnight phenomenon and within a period of just one month – the month of August -- has raised \$100 million. \$97 million more than the same period of time last year. Amazing what a bucket of cold water can do. With that most of us who participated put our buckets away. All of us except those who day in and day out care for our ALS friends. They're picking up their buckets every day. The lesson is not lost.

For we who would follow the Christ. We who would be transformed by the renewing of our minds. We who have been exhorted for our love to be genuine – know that the bucket we've been given while good sometimes to douse ourselves awake to a hurting world – is usually a bucket we're given to carry. To carry alongside of those whose hunger and hurt need the hourly, the daily, the monthly attention of a brother or sister. A no questions asked bucket of water. If you are thirsty, have something to drink. If you are dirty, then be cleaned. If your wounds are deep, let this water heal you. If you are hot, be cooled. If you are an enemy, know that love is more powerful than hate. Allow me, in other words, to carry your water. The living water. The baptismal water. The quenching water. The cleansing water. The soothing water. The cooling water. Let me carry your water.

What might that look like for you?

- Maybe it's spending an hour or two a week with a young child overwhelmed by school work. Tutoring for an hour or two - let me carry your water.
- Maybe it's helping out in the Food Pantry - packing bags, handing out food - let me carry your water.
- Maybe it's sitting in a nursery and nursing little babies - let me carry your water.
- Hanging out with a teenager trying to find himself - let me carry your water.
- Maybe it's reaching across the divide of disagreement - and though I may not understand you - I'll carry your water.

If only to be with you. I'll carry the water, if only to be with you. Though the bucket is heavy and though it carries with it risk. Risk that you may not appreciate it. You may kick it over. You may not share it with me. You may take it for granted. Risk that others will deride me for carrying it for you. Still let me carry your water.. As Christ has done. As Christ still does. As Christ will always do. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. Conformed not by the world, but transformed by the renewing of our minds. That we may follow Jesus and that love may be genuine.