

**Christian Spirituality:  
“Drink Deeply from the Wellspring of God’s Love”**

Isaiah 55:1-3, John 4:10-14

September 6<sup>th</sup>, 2015

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Last Sunday, we explored God’s unconditional acceptance as one important essential to Christian Spirituality. Today, I suggest that all of us reflect on the cross of Christ as another essential element for our spiritual center. Unfortunately, many people often have misunderstood or misinterpreted the meaning of Christ’s cross as a fearful image of God. Someone may argue Christian faith with a question, “Why is it that a violent execution becomes the center of God’s plan to redeem and reconcile a fallen, suffering world?” What should be our response to this ethical challenge of God? I just tell you that Jesus’ death was not God’s will, but the cross of Jesus was the place where God offered an extreme generosity and extravagant hospitality to human beings, the sinners through Jesus. Jesus was willing to offer himself as a gift in the cross. This morning, I hope that we will rediscover God’s merciful heart and forgiving love. Who is Jesus?

Today’s Scripture readings describe dialogue between Jesus and a woman at the well. Jesus was on the journey back to Galilee from Judea. He had to go through Samara. Samaria was not a comfortable area for Jewish people to pass through. Jewish people looked down on Samaritans because of the history of their interracial marriages. But Jesus wanted to break our racial and religious prejudice and stereotypes and was willing to offer his life for the work of reconciliation. Jesus was willing to interact with a Samaritan woman and listened to her life story. This woman failed many times to maintain her intimate relationships. She had been looking for something to fill the emptiness in her heart, but hadn’t found it yet. Jesus gave her water that made her thirsty no more. When Jesus received a drink from her, Jesus offered back the living water which never dries, but wells up to eternal life. Truly, the living water means full acceptance and forgiveness for her wounded heart. Jesus offered a new relationship to her empty life. Living water represents the full relationship with the forgiving and accepting God through the meeting with Jesus. Jacob’s well spiritually represents a place where God fully embraces, forgives and reconciles with the wounded hearts, sinners through the gift of Jesus.

In 2005, Mel Gibson made a movie, “The Passion of The Christ”. I watched that movie at the theater but I felt uncomfortable and uneasy because of its too realistic description of human suffering, Jesus’ pain and cruel crucifixion. I don’t mean to minimize the reality and degree of Jesus’ suffering,

but this made me think more about images of God and Jesus in our Christian faith. I believe that God is not a violent God. God wants restoration for his people not through punishment but by his mercy. That was why God sent the only Son Jesus and Jesus was willing to be a mediator between God and sinners dying on the cross. We know that God is not an angry God, and Jesus was not a passive sacrificial lamb. But the movie doesn't show us any Jesus' intentional will and willingness to bear his cross to save us. But passively was portrayed as a "sacrificial lamb" to be killed on the cross. Jesus is simply understood as a "substitute to be penalized for our sins" to pacify angry God. This is not a healthy spiritual understanding of Jesus because in this model, God wills Jesus' death then, God is still left to us as a violent God. This type of theory of atonement undermines the purpose of Jesus' crucifixion to save us and solely focuses on God's retributive justice. Jesus' role was an active mediator not a passive ransom in between God and us.

In the 1090s, St. Anselm developed a traditional atonement theory in his book, "Christ the Victor" and its subset, the "Ransom" theory. According to St. Anselm, atonement assumes human beings are estranged from God and one another and are powerless to restore harmony. Christianity identifies the divine act by which harmony is restored as atonement; it occurs in the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Unfortunately St. Anselm's theory, called the "satisfaction" theory of atonement, has often been misunderstood in the Christianity history. In this misinterpretation, sin as the breaking of a covenant promise is perceived as creating a problem for God primarily because it insults God's dignity as sovereign Lord. God is angry about this, and this "God of justice" needs the humiliation or blood of the perpetrator before God will pardon the insult. But Anselm believes that the main problem created by human murder and betrayal is not the tainting of God's honor. It is the breaking of a covenant. The breaking of promises ruptures mutual relations of trust. What angers God is the threat to the world God loves.<sup>1</sup> When God sent the only Son to humanity, God's *intentional will* wasn't for punishment or sacrifice of the Only Son. Jesus' death was not God's will, but it was a consequence of our sin against God. God *allowed* the only Son to take on the cross, because God *so* loved the world and desired to restore a new divine-human relationship through mercy and forgiveness in the cross. Our God is loving and forgiving.

To explain the loving and forgiving God, let's look at parenthood. This story is about my second son, Joshua, a 19 months old baby but also he is fearless like a world destroyer. Just a week ago, I found that he colored on the walls with crayons and pencils. Actually, the week before, I had to remove his

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<sup>1</sup> Some ideas and insights from Gregory Anderson Love's Book, *Violence and the Cross: How the Nonviolent God Saves us through the Cross of Christ*, 2010

drawing on the treadmill belt. I clearly told him that he should use crayons and pencils only on the paper not on the wall, but he won't stop doing it. Actually, early this week, I happened to find another drawing in the living room while I was fixing a window blind that he broke. When I have tried to take his pencils and crayons away from him, he cried loudly. As a parent, I realized that every baby is different, because our parenting experience for his brother Jacob didn't work well for Joshua. He is very different from his brother. When Youngjae and I had Joshua, we naively thought that the second one's parenting would be much easier. But it wasn't true. When I have to discipline Joshua for his wrongdoing, I kept him reminding him of what he was supposed to do. I held his two hands and looked in his eyes. He seemed to listen to me, but a while later, he did the same thing. It will take time for us to find the best way to teach him right. But the love and forgiving parent is always my intent when I discipline him. I believe God also treats us in the same way. God didn't punish his children, instead, God sent the His only Son to save us who struggle in the human condition and predicament of sin.

Jesus our Christ offered the living water to a Samaritan woman as a token of gratitude that he received a drink of water from her at the well. Spiritually speaking, when the woman opened her heart to Jesus, God offered her grace through Jesus with a blessing of eternal life. The cross of Christ was not God's penalty for our sin, instead Jesus was willing to offer himself as a gift of the living water. This will never make us thirsty again. Whoever comes and opens their hearts before him will have eternal life. Jesus invites us all saying, "Come freely and drink deeply from the wellspring of God's love. This is what our compassionate God offers to us all through the cross of Jesus. Amen.