

Easter 5 Year C 2013

Think for a moment about this question. What is the greatest discovery of all time, and not just in modern times but going back millions of years ago?.....Hold that thought.

I found on the internet an article, written in 2000 by John McCrone and published in the New Scientist. I want to share some highlights from this article. The Homo sapiens mental revolution took place between 100,000 and 40,000 years ago, following the development of grammatical speech. But Homo erectus was pretty smart already judging by evidence that fire had been discovered over 1.6 million years ago. Could fire really have been such an early discovery?

New evidence, ..., suggests that human exploitation of fire may be quite incredibly ancient, going back some 1.6 million years. Recently developed forensic techniques are strengthening the case that some long-disputed fire remains found in Kenya, East Africa, were indeed kindled by our ancestors. And dramatic new findings show evidence for the presence of fire at other sites including the famous Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania—which is the missing link in the eyes of many fire researchers. Scientists are now planning to go back to Africa to reopen old excavations in the hope of ending once and for all the controversy about the origins of fire.

We're going to come back to the topic of fire but for now I want to leave us with a question, "What would it be like to discover fire for a second time?" What could be so transformative for our world like that of the discovery of fire?

Have you heard the joke about the lady who put a "Honk if you Love Jesus" bumper sticker on her car? One afternoon this lady was stopped at a red light. Well the light turned to green and she didn't move because she was lost in thought. When everyone started honking their horns she was delighted because she thought they were responding to her bumper sticker, "Honk if you love Jesus." Of course people were honking because she wasn't moving and they were getting impatient. As I thought about this joke it made me think about the ways in which Christian people advertise their faith. Some people wear medals or crosses around their necks or on their jackets. I think one of the most common things I see out in the world are those fish shaped emblems that people put on their cars. The fish is supposed to stand for Jesus but sometimes I wonder what folks are really advertising?

The Gospel this morning challenges us with what I think we could call the bottom line in Christian advertising. At his last supper with his disciples Jesus gave them a new commandment. "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." Now here's the advertisement. "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." If we are to be known as Jesus' disciples then it is by our love, by our love for one another. That's the advertising. Like any other trademark, according to Jesus, love for one another is the Christian trademark.

I want to share something written by Julie Pennington-Russell. "Earl Weaver, who for years as manager of the Baltimore Orioles, was a notorious umpire baiter – he could harass an ump with the best of them. He was especially

known for one particular taunt. Whenever Earl disagreed with a call, he'd typically run out of the dugout, charge into the umpire's face and scream at him: "Are you gonna get any better, or is this it?"

As a believer in Christ, I find myself often asking that very question about the world, about the church, about myself: "Are we going to get any better?" I look at a world full of violence and despair, greed, hunger. And I look at the church, often half asleep, in the sanctuary or bashing each other's brains out over doctrinal differences. And then I look at my own self orbiting, narcissistic life, and the older I get the more convinced I become that what the world needs most, what the church needs most, and definitely what my life needs most urgently – more than discipline, more than knowledge, more than zeal – is love. And I'm convinced that nothing will distinguish us as Christ's followers more clearly in this world than a genuine commitment to love, more radically, more earnestly, more deeply.

So let's consider what this might mean, but first let's go ahead and put one confession on the table: love's not the easiest subject in the world to get a handle on. I mean, is there any single topic in this world about which we have spoken, or written or sung, more than love? And is there any subject more difficult to articulate?

We talk about love in such funny ways. We talk of 'falling in love' as if it were a hole. We use the same word when talking about a favorite dessert that we use when talking about a cherished individual. I love my husband. I love pecan pie. I love humanity. I love my minivan. I love God. How do we take hold of this word? I think Eliza

Doolittle has the right idea. In *My Fair Lady* she cries out in a frustrated voice: "Words, words, words! I'm so tired of words! Don't talk to me of love, don't talk to me of June, don't talk to me of anything at all, just show me."

I have a friend, Roger, who is a pastor in Austin, Texas. Roger tells of how, years ago, he tried to learn how to whittle. He went to a man named Joe McMordie who was an accomplished wood carver.... One day they were carving a little dog and Roger, all frustrated, asked, "How do you do this? What's the secret of carving?" Joe looked at him thoughtfully for a moment and said, "That's easy. You pick up a piece of wood and just cut off everything that doesn't look like a dog."

So we begin with what doesn't look like love. And we listen in order to understand what needs to be cut away from us in order to allow genuine love to take root in our living. First, love is not envious... And love is not boastful or arrogant... And neither is love rude... And love doesn't insist on its own way... Love doesn't elbow its way to the head of the line. Nor is love easily provoked... And love isn't resentful; it doesn't keep score... Finally, love doesn't rejoice in wrongdoing; that is it finds no reason to celebrate the downfall of other people.

So what about the things love is? Paul says love is patient; never gives up. And love is kind. Love takes pleasure in what's right and true. Love bears all things; puts up with anything and believes all things; trusts God always. Love hopes all things; always looks for the best. And love endures all things; keeps going till the end." ... When Jesus was here among us, he showed us one thing

more about love that is indispensable: love is always something you do.”

For me one of the really good questions we have to ask ourselves each day is “Are we gonna get any better, or is this it?” It’s a daily decision to take actions to be the kind of person that keep’s getting better. I really like the image of carving the dog, because as we cut away the things that don’t look like love, the things that are love begin to take shape. One of my favorite quotes is from Michelangelo. Once when asked about his sculptures and how he was able to create such incredible works of art he responded by saying that all he did was work to reveal what was already in the marble. The form already existed and it was his job to uncover it, to reveal it. The same could be said for cooking. We produce wonderful and delicious things to eat but the essence of that deliciousness already exists in the natural food ingredients we use to create it. And most certainly it is the same for love. Love exists within us, it is already there and it is our job to reveal it.

In a few short weeks the season of Pentecost will be here. Pentecost is the fulfillment of Christ’s promise that God would send the Spirit to be with us always and to give power to God’s people. The book of Acts tells us that the Holy Spirit came like the rush of a mighty-wind, with tongues of flame like fire that rested on each person.

God invented fire and it was our human ancestors perhaps some 1.6 million years ago who discovered how to use it. We discover love everyday by living in love, growing in love, believing in love, and finding that fire of the Holy Spirit within ourselves. We’re never perfect but if we continue whittling away then the fire of love is what gets

revealed as all of the things that aren't love get cut away. Millions of years ago the discovery of fire changed our world, and nothing would be as we know it today without that discovery. The new commandment given in the Gospel directs us toward the discovery of love which has an even greater power to change our world. This is the message that was so important for Jesus to give his followers on that last night when he ate supper with them. Love is the greatest power. So let me end with a quote which I hope will remain with each of us as we make that decision each day to get deeper in love, that decision each day that we make to reveal the fire of love within our beings. Jesus is indeed calling us to discover fire for a second time.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the French priest, author, and teacher, knew what Jesus was asking of his disciples. Near the end of his life he wrote this. "Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for a second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire."