

"CONSIDER THE KETCHUP BOTTLE"

A SERMON BASED ON PETER'S FIRST LETTER (1 PETER 3:13-22) AND PRESENTED FOR ORLEAN UMC ON JUNE 20, 2021----THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF MY FINAL SERMON SERIES FOCUSING ON THE THEMES OF LEGACY AND THE PROMISES OF GOD

IT'S THE QUINTESSENTIAL CONDIMENT FOUND IN NEARLY EVERY AMERICAN REFRIGERATOR AND EVERY AMERICAN TABLE IN EVERY REAL AMERICAN DINER..... WE PUT IT ON EVERYTHING FROM EGGS TO FRIES TO HOT DOGS, AND THE THICKER THE BETTER.

IT TAKES SOME WELL-PLACED WHACKS ON THE BOTTLE OR A HEALTHY SQUEEZE TO GET IT MOVING FROM BOTTLE TO PLATE, BUT, AS THE OLD COMMERCIAL JINGLE SAID, "ANTICIPATION" MAKES IT WORTH THE WAIT.

WE'RE TALKING ABOUT KETCHUP, OF COURSE, WHICH ISN'T SOMETHING THAT PEOPLE NORMALLY TALK ABOUT, ESPECIALLY ON A SUNDAY MORNING. IN FACT, WE RARELY TALK ABOUT IT AT ALL, EVEN WHEN WE'RE POURING IT ON A BURGER. IT'S JUST SOMETHING WE TAKE FOR GRANTED.

THE HISTORY OF KETCHUP, HOWEVER, REVEALS AN INTERESTING STORY. BEFORE H.J. HEINZ STARTED MAKING KETCHUP AND PUTTING IT IN THE ICONIC GLASS BOTTLE THAT ADORNS OUR TABLE, PUTTING KETCHUP ON ANYTHING WAS THE EQUIVALENT OF POURING TOXIC WASTE ON IT..... EATING KETCHUP COULD BE DANGEROUS.

KETCHUP IN 1866 WAS, ACCORDING TO COOKBOOK AUTHOR PIERRE BLOT, "FILTHY, DECOMPOSED AND PUTRID."

A SHORT TOMATO GROWING SEASON, COUPLED WITH CARELESSNESS, LACK OF CLEAN STORAGE, GENERALLY UNSANITARY CONDITIONS AND THE ADDITION OF HIGHLY FLAMMABLE COAL TAR TO THE MIX TO ENHANCE THE RED COLOR, ALL COMBINED TO MAKE KETCHUP A POTENTIALLY LETHAL CONCOCTION.

IN AN 1896 STUDY, FOR EXAMPLE, 90 PERCENT OF COMMERCIAL KETCHUPS WERE FOUND TO CONTAIN "INJURIOUS INGREDIENTS THAT COULD LEAD TO DEATH."

**AND YOU THOUGHT THAT DOUBLE BURGER
WITH EXTRA CHEESE AND BACON WAS
DANGEROUS!**

**ENTER HENRY J. HEINZ..... IN 1876, THE
PITTSBURGH VISIONARY BOTTLED HIS FIRST
BATCH OF TOMATO KETCHUP. HEINZ WAS A
MORALLY STRONG MAN WHO BELIEVED THAT
"HEART POWER IS BETTER THAN
HORSEPOWER," AND WORKED HARD AT
DEVELOPING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT AND
PROCESS FOR KETCHUP TO BE PRODUCED IN A
WAY THAT WAS PURE, ENJOYABLE AND
TRANSPARENT.**

HIS FACTORY WAS SPOTLESS. HIS WORKERS WERE ENCOURAGED TO BE METICULOUS ABOUT CLEANLINESS, AND HEINZ REWARDED THEM WITH FRESH UNIFORMS, FREE LAUNDRY, FREE LIFE INSURANCE AND HEALTH CARE, ATHLETIC FACILITIES, A SWIMMING POOL AND EVEN AN IN-HOUSE MANICURIST TO MAKE SURE THAT EVERY WORKER'S NAILS WERE IMMACULATE.

THE RESULT WAS A PERFECT ENVIRONMENT FOR MAKING A KETCHUP THAT WOULD NOT ONLY *NOT KILL YOU*, IT WAS SO GOOD THAT IT BECAME A STAPLE ON AMERICAN DINNER TABLES FOR THE NEXT TWO CENTURIES!

HEINZ WAS SO FOCUSED ON PURITY AND TRANSPARENCY THAT HE REFUSED TO BOTTLE HIS KETCHUP IN THE OPAQUE BROWN BOTTLES THAT WERE COMMON AT THE TIME, CHOOSING INSTEAD TO USE CLEAR GLASS BOTTLES AS A WAY OF DEMONSTRATING THE PRODUCT'S PURITY TO THE PUBLIC. HEINZ EVEN OPENED HIS FACTORY TO 30,000 VISITORS PER YEAR SO THEY COULD SEE THAT THE COMPANY HAD NOTHING TO HIDE. "IT'S ALWAYS SAFE TO BUY THE PRODUCTS OF AN ESTABLISHMENT THAT KEEPS ITS DOORS OPEN," HE ONCE WROTE.

BY 1906, HEINZ WAS SELLING FIVE MILLION BOTTLES OF PRESERVATIVE-FREE KETCHUP EVERY YEAR, AND CHANCES ARE THAT THE NEXT TRANSPARENT BOTTLE OF KETCHUP YOU REACH FOR IN 2021 STILL HAS THE HEINZ LABEL ON IT.

HENRY HEINZ BUILT A LASTING LEGACY BASED ON TRANSPARENCY, EARNING THE TRUST OF CONSUMERS BECAUSE HE FOCUSED ON PURITY AND QUALITY AND HID NOTHING FROM THEM.

**THAT CLEAR, QUALITY BOTTLE OF KETCHUP,
WHETHER IT'S THE TRADITIONAL GLASS DESIGN
OR THE SQUEEZE BOTTLE, IS STILL SOMETHING
THAT PEOPLE TRUST WELL ENOUGH TO TAKE
FOR GRANTED..... THE TRANSPARENT
CHARACTER OF H.J. HEINZ IS STILL REFLECTED
IN EVERY ONE OF HIS PRODUCTS, LONG AFTER
HIS DEATH IN MAY OF 1919.**

**HEINZ MADE KETCHUP, BUT HE WAS EVEN MORE
CONCERNED ABOUT MAKING THE WORLD A
BETTER PLACE.**

ARE WE AS "EAGER TO DO GOOD," AS PETER PUTS IT IN THIS WEEK'S READING? (V. 13). ARE WE LIVING LIVES THAT ARE EQUALLY TRANSPARENT, "DOING WHAT IS RIGHT" NO MATTER WHAT IT MIGHT COST US? (V. 14). PETER OFFERS US SOME ENTREPRENEURIAL ADVICE ON HOW TO LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IN SUCH A WAY THAT *EVERY ONE WHO SEES US WILL KNOW EXACTLY WHAT'S INSIDE.*

PETER IS WRITING TO CHURCHES IN ASIA MINOR WHO ARE UNDERGOING A GREAT PERIOD OF DISTRESS AND PERSECUTION FOR THEIR FAITH.

THEIR ENVIRONMENT STINKS TO HIGH HEAVEN AS THEY SAY AND THEY'RE SUFFERING IN A WORLD WHERE THE HIDDEN AGENDAS AND FILTHY TACTICS OF THEIR OPPONENTS ARE "INJURIOUS INGREDIENTS THAT COULD LEAD TO DEATH."

RATHER THAN RETALIATE OR TURN UP THEIR NOSES AT THIS SITUATION, PETER ENCOURAGES THE CHURCHES TO LIVE LIVES OF PURITY IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING, "KEEPING A CLEAR CONSCIENCE SO THAT THOSE WHO SPEAK MALICIOUSLY AGAINST YOUR GOOD BEHAVIOR IN CHRIST MAY BE ASHAMED OF THEIR SLANDER" (V. 16).

INDEED, PETER SAYS, "EVEN IF YOU SHOULD SUFFER FOR WHAT IS RIGHT, YOU ARE BLESSED" (V. 14). THE REAL TEST OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS THE ABILITY TO STAY PURE AND TRANSPARENT, EVEN WHEN OTHERS ARE TRYING TO DUMP THE SPIRITUAL EQUIVALENT OF TOXIC COAL TAR INTO YOUR LIFE.

SUFFERING IS INEVITABLE IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE, BUT THE WAY WE REACT TO IT MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE.

IN FACT, IN READING THROUGH THE NEW TESTAMENT IT'S CLEAR THAT GOD SOMEHOW USES (BUT NOT CAUSES) SUFFERING TO PRODUCE SOMETHING IN US..... IN PAUL'S LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN ROME (5:3) FOR EXAMPLE, PAUL SAYS THAT SUFFERING PRODUCES ENDURANCE, ENDURANCE PRODUCES CHARACTER AND CHARACTER PRODUCES HOPE..... JESUS SAID THAT WE SHOULD REJOICE WHEN WE SUFFER, BECAUSE IT MEANS THAT WE'RE REPRESENTING HIM AND WE'RE COMING CLOSER TO THE KINGDOM (MATTHEW 5:10-11). SOMEHOW, IN A COUNTERINTUITIVE WAY, SUFFERING CAN WIND UP PRODUCING THE BEST IN US.

WE ONLY NEED TO LOOK AT A KETCHUP BOTTLE TO BE REMINDED OF THIS. THE CLASSIC GLASS HEINZ BOTTLE DOESN'T MAKE IT EASY TO POUR OUT THE KETCHUP. THE THICK TOMATO MIXTURE IS STRENGTHENED WITH XANTHAN GUM, WHICH MAKES IT WHAT IS CALLED A "NON-NEWTONIAN FLUID," OR ONE THAT CHANGES ITS VISCOSITY OR FLOW RATE UNDER STRESS. THAT'S WHY YOU HAVE TO WHACK A BOTTLE OF HEINZ KETCHUP REPEATEDLY TO GET THE GOOD STUFF TO COME OUT, BUT IT HAS TO BE DONE CORRECTLY.

POUNDING ON THE BOTTOM OF THE BOTTLE ONLY CAUSES THE NON-NEWTONIAN MIX AT THE MOUTH OF THE BOTTLE TO GET THICKER, THUS RESTRICTING THE FLOW ---AND MAKING THAT HOT DOG A LITTLE LESS HOT BECAUSE OF THE WAIT----

INSTEAD, EVERY KETCHUP CONNOSSIEUR KNOWS THAT THE WAY YOU GET THE KETCHUP TO TRANSFORM INTO SHEER THINNING FLUID, OR NON-NEWTONIAN FLUID, IS TO TAP ON THE *TOP* OF THE BOTTLE OR, EVEN MORE IDEALLY, TO TAP TWO FINGERS ON THE "57 VARIETIES" LABEL ON THE BOTTLE'S NECK.

**THAT'S THE FORCE THAT PRODUCES THE GOOD
STUFF.**

**THE POUNDING OF PERSECUTION AND
SUFFERING CAN PRODUCE THE SAME EFFECT IN
US. *IT CAN EITHER CAUSE US TO STIFFEN, OR IT
CAN TRIGGER A FLOW OF THE FRUIT OF THE
SPIRIT IN US THAT CAN SEASON THE
WORLD (GALATIANS 5:22). PETER SAYS THAT
THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENED WITH JESUS,
WHO SUFFERED FOR OUR SINS ON THE CROSS
AND YET PRODUCED THE EFFECT OF BRINGING
PEOPLE TO GOD (V. 18).***

WHEN WE "SANCTIFY CHRIST AS LORD" IN OUR HEARTS AND RESPOND TO SUFFERING BY GIVING AN ACCOUNT OF THIS HOPE IN CHRIST THAT IS WITHIN US WITH "GENTLENESS AND REVERENCE," WE PRODUCE THE KIND OF FRUIT THAT IS TRANSPARENTLY CLEAR IN CONSCIENCE, AND PURE IN HEART, LIFE AND MOTIVE (VV. 15-16).

JESUS' OWN FRUITFULNESS EXTENDED TO THE "SPIRITS IN PRISON," THOSE PEOPLE WHO WERE DISOBEDIENT IN THE DAYS OF NOAH (VV. 19-20).

SCHOLARS DEBATE WHAT PETER ACTUALLY MEANS HERE, BUT THE MAIN THRUST OF THESE VERSES IS ABOUT BAPTISM, WHICH IS THE ULTIMATE MARK OF PURITY, TRANSPARENCY AND CLEANLINESS FOR THE CHRISTIAN.

LIKE GOD SAVED NOAH AND HIS FAMILY "THROUGH WATER" DURING THE DAYS OF THE FLOOD, SO GOD SAVES US THROUGH BAPTISM INTO THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF CHRIST. IT'S A CLEANSING THAT GOES MUCH DEEPER THAN THE REMOVAL OF THE DIRT AND CRUD THAT DEFILES THE BODY AND MAKES EVEN THINGS LIKE KETCHUP TO BE LETHAL.

**INSTEAD, IT'S A CLEANSING THAT STERILIZES
AND PROTECTS US FROM THE LONG-TERM
EFFECTS OF DEATH. BAPTISM REMINDS US THAT
WE'RE PEOPLE BELONGING TO JESUS AND THAT
WE'RE TO REFLECT HIM IN OUR CONDUCT, OUR
CHARACTER AND EVEN IN OUR SUFFERING.**

**WHAT KIND OF SUFFERING HAS BEEN POUNDING
AT YOU THESE DAYS? HOW CAN YOU ALLOW
JESUS TO HELP YOU MAKE IT FRUITFUL? IN
WHAT WAYS ARE YOU LIVING OUT YOUR
BAPTISM, BEING A TRANSPARENT WITNESS FOR
CHRIST IN THE WORLD? AS JESUS SAID, THE
TRUE PEOPLE OF GOD WILL BE "KNOWN BY
THEIR FRUITS" (MATTHEW 7:16).**

ARE WE PRESENTING OURSELVES TO THE
WORLD AS AN OPAQUE BOTTLE OF ROTTING
INGREDIENTS, FULL OF HATRED, SIN AND
REVENGE?

OR, ARE WE PURE, INVITING AND TRANSPARENT,
"KEEPING OUR DOORS OPEN" AND INVITING THE
WORLD TO SEE THE VISION OF THE ONE WHO
LOVES US, CARES FOR US AND EMPLOYS US?

NEXT TIME YOU PICK UP A BOTTLE OF HEINZ
KETCHUP AND START POUNDING ON IT OR
SQUEEZING IT, REMEMBER WHERE IT CAME
FROM ... AND REMEMBER WHERE YOU CAME
FROM, TOO!-----AND WHERE YOU ARE HEADED
ONE DAY!!!

PRAISE GOD AND MAY IT BE SO FOR YOU AND
FOR ME.....AMEN.....