

## **“Being Religious Without Being Righteous”**

### **Isaiah 1:10-20**

Dan Taddeo rarely missed a Sunday morning Adult Forum Bible study over the past 16 years. Dan was always ready with a quotable quote or words of wisdom to share. He also self-published several books and wrote columns for the Parma Observer entitled “Inspiration”. Dan always emphasized the sin of being religious without being righteous.

I want to use a little bit of Dan’s story to illustrate our Isaiah text and Dan’s own writings about “being religious without being righteous”.

Dan was born the eighth of eight children on July 14, 1930 in Monaca Township, PA, about 20 miles north of Pittsburg. Dan’s father worked for Jones and Laughlin, J&L Steel before becoming a tenant farmer on 90 acres. His mother and what would have been his younger sibling both died during childbirth. Dan’s oldest sister dropped out of school to help his father raise the 7 younger children.

Dan described a simpler time when he believed he had all he needed and was never in want. The children worked together on the farm to do whatever needed to be done. His father didn’t drive, but he did deliver the milk from their cows every morning from a one horse spring wagon. They grew most of their food and did a lot of canning of peppers, tomatoes, pickles, pears, peaches, and beans. His father bought everything in bulk – 100 lbs. of salt, 100 lbs. of flour, and 15 lbs. of pasta.

Dan and his siblings would shortcut across fields in walking to their two room elementary school. Because there was no high school in his township, he would get up on the road and hope to hitch a ride to Aliquippa High School from where he graduated in 1948.

After working a year at A&P, Dan enlisted in the Army. He left home for the first time for basic training in Trenton, New Jersey. He described the 3 ½ day train ride across the country to Fort Lewis, Washington as a “fun vacation”. He was trained as an engineer to build and destroy bridges. His unit was stationed in Germany during his service from 1949 to 1953.

Dan returned to the green pastures of Pennsylvania to take advantage of the GI bill to earn a Bachelor’s degree in education from Geneva College in just 3 years. He did his student teaching in Beaver Falls who hired him to teach English (his minor) in their Junior High. During his first year of teaching in 1956, he married Linda in the Lutheran Church at Lake Chautauqua.

Dan’s soul was renewed with the blessing of 3 children – Laurie, Dana, and Christian. He was guided on the pathway to our Parma school system when Parma’s assistant superintendant came to Beaver Falls recruiting teachers. Dan was hired to continue teaching junior high English with a raise from \$3,000 a year to \$4,800 a year.

Dan and Linda bought a new house in Brook Park and enrolled their children in Berea schools. Dan and 3 other teachers went to Kent State to earn their master degrees. Dan became the counselor at Pleasant Valley Junior High before becoming the counselor department chair at Greenbriar Junior High when it opened in 1962.

When their parents became ill, Dan and family moved back to Beaver Falls where he built a new house on the farm he grew up on. His children graduated from high school there.

After divorce and retirement, Dan moved back here and became a substitute teacher, worked at Metroparks, and taught classes at Tri-C. While house-sitting for a friend and cutting the grass, he introduced himself to the woman living next door named Pat Smith, which began

an 18 year relationship. Dan told me that in the Smith family, he and Laura were known as the outlaws. Then he asked me, "Do you know the difference between an in-law and an outlaw? Pretending to have not heard it before, I asked, "What's the difference?" With the Dan sly smile on his face, he said, "An outlaw is wanted".

Joining the Smith gang meant joining Divinity which meant my enjoying Dan's presence and wisdom most Sunday mornings in adult Sunday School class since 2003. In recent years Dan and Barb Skerl would come to class together, enjoying one another's companionship. It also meant having Laura available to edit his first of several books, entitled "Back to Basics". Dan also wrote a column for the "Parma Observer". I share with you one column that I think summarizes Dan's faith and his life.

**I Believe**  
*by Daniel Taddeo*

"A new commandment I give you: Love one another as I have loved you." Each of us is called to follow the example of Jesus.

Beauty in our culture is in major transition. It is moving from an internal, invisible beauty, such as heart-felt concern, mannerly conduct, and spiritually directed, to a physical, visible, and external beauty, such as extreme body decorations, indiscreet dress, and arrogant presentation. This "beauty-battle" rages between self-centeredness and God-centeredness.

Because of the culture, a small minority of us consider ourselves as handsome. The large majority of us are considered plain, unattractive, or ugly. God views us all as being beautiful and handsome.

Each day we live is a priceless gift of God, loaded with possibilities to learn something new and to gain fresh insight.

Either people believe in Jesus for salvation or they do not. There is no middle ground between heaven and hell.

Five major warnings from God's Word are the following: do not be deceived by culture proclamations; believers will suffer persecution of some kind; be aware of false prophets; do not believe those who say when Christ will return; and avoid becoming overly occupied with the cares of the world.

No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him.

There is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out in the open.

We would not invite a thief into our house, so why would we allow thoughts that steal our joy to make them at home in our house.

Where we have been, what we have done, and where we are now matters far less than where we are headed.

With God's help we have the power to encourage or discourage, to motivate or deflate, to generate joy or repel it. These are very realistic possibilities.

Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes (acceptable in good taste but not required); instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.

Self-reflection is always a good exercise. What I believe is a work in progress, not limited to these statements and subject to change. What do YOU believe?

The huge sin to which Dan and the prophet Isaiah alludes is the sin of being religious without being righteous. Through Isaiah, God notes that people with power are carefully observing religious festivals and worship of God, but they are also running corrupt court systems that favor those with bribe money. They are oppressing the poor and leaving orphans and widows to fend for themselves.

So God says, “Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.”

Then, and only then, will the Lord see any value in their pious acts of worship.

But change is possible, and so the Lord says, “Come now, let us argue it out: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool” (v. 18).

We could say that the overall lesson of this text is: “Don’t do the wrong thing; do the right thing.” This, however, leaves us with a question: Why did they need to be told that? As the people of Israel, they had the laws of Moses and knew of the covenant between God and Israel. They surely knew already that God wanted them to “hate evil and love good” (Amos 5:15), to avoid what is wrong, and embrace what is right and to pursue righteousness and flee wickedness. So why weren’t they doing it?

We could, in fact, ask the same question about ourselves. When we consciously do something wrong, usually it’s not because we don’t know any better. Rather, there seems to be a *spiritual* duality in us that’s always in conflict. The apostle Paul calls it the old nature and the new nature.

It's like those cartoons where a man is torn about what to do. A tiny angel stands on one shoulder advising him to do the right thing, and a tiny devil stands on the other shoulder advising him to do the opposite.

And if you think that's too silly an image, listen to these words of the apostle Paul from Romans 7: "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate" (7:14-15). Paul was aware of an inner conflict — a struggle in which he was pulled in diametrically opposed directions.

Part of the problem is that often when we deliberately do the wrong thing and nothing bad happens to us, it becomes easier the next time to do it again.

To justify doing the wrong thing over and over again we do 4 things.

- We make up our own rules;
- We lower our standards;
- We decide that we're flawed and that's okay; and
- We rationalize or make up excuses for our behavior.

The people whom Isaiah was addressing provide an example of that very sequence. They wanted to stay in God's good graces, but by coming up with their own rules for their behavior, they justified mistreating others while being pious in terms of observing all the religious festivals and other ritualistic practices their religion required. Thus, Isaiah's message was that *God does not value ritual without reformation*, without action, without ministry. Or as Dan would say, "Being religious without being righteous". As a Stephen Minister Dan believed in being right with one another in caring for one another.

As a Stephen's Minister, Dan shared Holy Communion with his care receivers along with a few games of cards many times. I was blessed to share Holy Communion with Dan many times. Our sins are forgiven and our faith is strengthened when we receive Christ's presence in the bread and wine.

Dan's faith was strengthened as he looked back on his life, he could join with the prophet Isaiah who writes in verses 16 – 17 . . . <sup>16</sup>Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, <sup>17</sup>learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.

This morning, at the other end of life, at the beginning of life, Nathon and Angela bring forth their newest born, Colt Michael McRae, who to use Isaiah's words, "will be washed, will be made clean." With the support of his family and this community of faith, Colt will "learn to do good and to seek justice" as a baptized child of God.

With a prophetic life and faith, Dan looked forward to eternity where he is in full communion with Jesus Christ and all those he loved. Colt begins that journey this morning in the sacrament of Holy Baptism.

May the peace of God . . .

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