

Surprises

I find that my life is still full of surprises. I cannot really say, "I've seen it all!" There are many things that surprise me about God's creation: The sudden smile and giggle of a baby, flowers found where they are least expected - in the middle of a lawn, at the side of the road, in the midst of the desert. Or when I looked at my wife's hair and thought she had put a streak of color in it: green and red; but it was the refracted sunlight coming through the corner of the plexiglass in the outdoor patio.



There are bad things that surprise me as well. It surprised me how tenaciously my mother-in-law clung to life. She was ready to go to Jesus. She had no doubts about her final destination. But she drew breath after breath long after it seemed even possible.

It surprises me how many people I know have cancer. I don't know that the rate is any higher than it used to be. It may just be the age category that I am in. It surprises me how easily people deceive themselves. Addicts cannot face the reality that they are enslaved by their addiction. They will do anything and say anything to hold on to their master, including lie, hurt and destroy all those who love them.

Addicts aren't the only ones who deceive themselves. Our times and the people of today will be remembered by the epitaph, "They deceive themselves and the truth is not in them." People think their biology is as "fluid" as their emotions, that their feelings can determine their gender. It is not only that particular immutable trait that they feel they can mutate. It's even their race, white people parading as black and native Americans. One can easily understand someone trying to escape racial oppression by pretending to be the privileged class. But what does that say about who is privileged when it becomes popular for whites to become minorities?

Or how about our language? Love is lust, but that has been going on since the Fall. Reproductive rights mean the right to destroy rather than reproduce. Tolerance means destroying all who believe differently than you and embracing only that which you believe everyone else should believe. Compassion means lawlessness and licentiousness. Burning and looting are called peaceful protests.

“So, what does all that really have to do with Christianity, Pastor?” you might ask. Everything we do and say has to do with Christianity. God is our maker and we are His creatures. We can deny this but it is as real as gravity and as indifferent toward our opinions as well.

We think we are independent, in-control, and self-reliant... until a pandemic, or an earthquake, or a plane crash, or a myriad of other disasters comes upon us. A business closes and we might become homeless. Death humbles us all. Yet how rarely we acknowledge our true helplessness? We think we are ok, that we are basically good. A brief look at the world around us refutes that belief, at least for the majority. The truth is, whether under the surface or in full view of all, we are all sinners who cannot save themselves. We do not and cannot love God with our whole heart or love our neighbors as ourselves. And we cannot believe in Jesus Christ or come to Him.

Fortunately, like the beauty of the flower discovered in the midst of the desert, God comes to save us. It's hard to believe, impossible, really. God in Jesus Christ does everything necessary for our rescue. And knowing our skepticism and our ability to deceive ourselves, He still calls us by the Gospel, enlightens us with His gifts, sanctifies and keeps us in the true faith that we may have life everlasting with him. It surprises me every day, that God would love me and you despite anything we may have done. Even in our darkest hour, surprise! Open your eyes and ears to the bright joy of knowing that God does this purely out of fatherly, divine, goodness and mercy without any merit or worthiness in us.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus! Amen!

Pastor Jim

