



THE BIG REVEAL
SCRIPTURE: PSALM 66: 8-20; JOHN 14:15-21
GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC
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Psalm 66:8-20

66:8 Bless our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard,

66:9 who has kept us among the living, and has not let our feet slip.

66:10 For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried.

66:11 You brought us into the net; you laid burdens on our backs;

66:12 you let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water;
yet you have brought us out to a spacious place.

66:13 I will come into your house with burnt offerings; I will pay you my vows,

66:14 those that my lips uttered and my mouth promised when I was in trouble.

66:15 I will offer to you burnt offerings of fatlings, with the smoke of the sacrifice of
rams; I will make an offering of bulls and goats. Selah

66:16 Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for me.

66:17 I cried aloud to him, and he was extolled with my tongue.

66:18 If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.

66:19 But truly God has listened; he has given heed to the words of my prayer.

66:20 Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his
steadfast love from me.

John 14:15-21

14:15 "If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

14:16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with
you forever.

14:17 This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither
sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be
in you.

14:18 "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.

14:19 In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live.

14:20 On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.

14:21 They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

There are some things about today's world that raise some big questions for me—and maybe for you, too. Questions that seem unanswerable, questions that are hard to ask. These questions challenge us to take a hard look at ourselves—to open our eyes to something we might not want to see.

It is one of those questions that I bring to you today—a hard question, a possibly unanswerable question, a question that challenges us to look in the mirror....

Why are there so many shows about house remodeling and house buying on TV right now?

No really, I am serious. What is up with that?

I counted over 32 shows: just to name a few--flip or flop, fixer upper, house hunters, rehab addict, tiny house hunters, tiny house nation, beachfront bargain hunt, lakefront bargain hunt, house crashers, kitchen crashers, bath crashers, we bought the farm, my house/your money, curb appeal, this new house, you live in what?, and one that I am sure is absolutely fascinating: the vanilla ice project—people of my generation remember the rapper vanilla ice and his song ice, ice baby—the promo for the show reads (I am not making this up), "Vanilla Ice has gone from rapping music to rapping nails... When he's done and admires all the changes, might he shout out 'nice, nice baby!'"

What is it that makes these shows so alluring, so captivating, so telling?

We hang on through contrived drama and ridiculous math about the cost of things that we know cannot be true—just to get to the big reveal—where we get to see the finished product and the reaction of the home owners and everything seems ok just for a few minutes until we go into our bathroom and think about how much better the bathroom would look with a new floor or a cool faucet and more windows.

These reality shows are actually short on reality, but strangely able to spin out a reality that we must wish were true. That someone can swoop in and fix everything at a cost we can afford—and everything will be beautiful from here on out.

Reality is that there are various law suits out there from families who have been on some of these shows: complaints of shoddy workmanship, rat infestations, incomplete finishes, and other complaints that you could anticipate in situations where someone takes your money to remodel your living space in ways you did not agree to. On many of these shows the homeowners don't get to keep much of the furniture—a lot of it is staged furniture. The only way they can keep it is to buy it—after they've just plunked down all the money they have for the remodel or purchase or both.

The big reveal isn't all it's cracked up to be—the end product fleeting and fragile, the process hasty and contrived.

Jesus' farewell discourse speaks into the nooks and crannies of our lives, into how we do things, into how we live in relationship with each other.

These rich chapters in John that spin out Jesus' words of farewell hold within them a kind of wonderment—that still lingers in our midst even today—will Jesus' followers love him when he is no longer right in front of them—showing them the way, explaining things they don't understand, taking the lead, giving encouragement and clarity in difficult and even intractable situations? And will Jesus followers of the future—like us, will we truly love him when we never got to know him like that first wave of followers did?¹

“If you love me you will keep my commandments.”

That's how we reveal to the world that we love God, that we know Jesus: we keep the commandments that he made abundantly clear.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind and love your neighbor as yourself.

It is not the end product, but the mode of operation that reveals Christ's continued presence in our midst. Love is Jesus' calling card—if we don't see it in our midst, then he is not here.

What reveals our love is how we do things—the big reveal is not where we end up, but the love we make and keep along the way in our lives together.

I was honored to pray at the Habitat for Humanity Blueprint Breakfast this past week.

Hearing from homeowners and from Andy Barnett, director, provided a glimpse into the complexity and the power of housing in this community and in our country, indeed in our world.

Habitat brings the complex realities of housing to bear on its mode of operation.

Housing affects everything—health care, family stability, work attendance, school performance, mental health, racialized disadvantages, economic disadvantage. And so, impacting housing in a sustainable way actually has an impact on just about every social ill that afflicts our society these days.

The beauty of Habitat’s model for home building is no doubt related to the allure of the 30+ reality TV shows about home remodeling that have captured our country’s imagination in a time when the wealth gap is increasing and opportunities to close the gap are decreasing.

The common denominator between house hunter and habitat is simple: We like dreaming about home and we want home to be real.

The differences between the mania of home improvement shows and Habitat, however, are important for us to notice—where one approach to finding home focuses on the big reveal at the end at the expense of the realities of the process, the other pours energy into the realities of the process enabling the process itself to reveal what home is really all about.

Habitat’s long history amplifies the dignity of communities constructed in the way we share power, in the ways we invest in each other. While the realities of life remain complicated, the effort to build sustainable community is clear. Homeowners take classes to learn how to manage money, on fire safety, and how to maintain their homes. Habitat is built on an understanding of human beings that we build community best when we have a sense of ownership in the procedures and decisions that affect us the most. People work alongside each other to let love build justice by embedding dignity and mutual relationships into the process.

Love builds and reveals its true character along the way.

Jesus tells his found family of faith not to be afraid, but to love. It is a clear directive—and it calls us into the world’s most difficult questions with an invitation to focus on the process knowing that the process is where Jesus tells us we will know he is present.

He promises the Spirit’s presence will enable us to do Christ’s work. We are not left without help, without the power to love. Paraclete—Greek word holds simultaneous meanings that one choice of translation doesn’t contain—comforter, advocate,

encourager, the one to call for help, the one to appeal to, the one who exhorts, the one who consoles.

The resurrection will go beyond a single moment in time, with the Spirit's help, to fill everything we do with a Jesus-revealing capacity, with a love amplifying possibility.

Wendell Berry tells the poetic story of life unfolding from a window²—looking out from home onto a world that a man sometimes struggles not to hate, and maybe forgets how to love. At turns the poem embodies the way we humans lose sight of the elegance of creation's symmetry and even joy, and what it tells us about human purpose.

The man at the window must look again for a way to love a world that he can sometimes barely recognize.

It is God's creation that calls him back to his brotherhood with the world, to the peace of living in this world as we were made to live in this world.

The window becomes a mirror for us to be reacquainted with our purpose to make home in this world by honoring the dignity of the everyday moments that make and keep love in our midst.

And the poem seems to become a prayer for the man at the window, indeed a prayer for all of humanity:

*May he waken
not too late from his wraths
to find his window still
clear in its wall, and the world
there. Within things
there is peace, and at the end
of things. It is the mind
turned away from the world
that turns against it...
Let men, who cannot be brothers
to themselves, be brothers
to mulleins ("mullens") and daisies
that have learned to live on the earth.
Let them understand the pride
of sycamores and thrushes
that receive the light gladly, and do not
think to illuminate themselves.
Let them know that the foxes and the owls
are joyous in their lives,*

*and their gayety is praise to the heavens,
...And when mind has not outraged
itself against its nature,
they die and become the place
they lived in. Peace to the bones
that walk in the sun toward death,
for they will come to it soon enough.
Let the phoebes return in spring
and build their nests of moss
in the porch rafters,
and in the autumn let them depart.
Let the garden be planted,
and let the frost come.
Peace to the porch and the garden.
Peace to the man in the window.*

Love reveals, it does not conceal. Love liberates with truth, it does not hold us captive with lies, with a façade of relationship.

If we want to see Jesus in our midst, then love must define who we are from the inside, out.

The big reveal is startling and yet so mundane—and it rests in a question that we are called to answer: how do we treat each other, how do we let the way we live our lives together reveal again and again Christ’s powerful and healing love alive and well in the world?

How do we look out from the window of our church home into a world inviting us to connect in new ways, inviting us to see ourselves in new ways? Our sanctuary discernment is a window not simply to our relationships with a broader world, but also a window into who we really are. Right now, Grace Covenant, this is the window that God has brought into our community to see what it reveals

Jesus’ love wasn’t a status quo kind of love; Jesus love changes things—it opens people up to each other, it strengthens our connections with the whole wide world and, most of all, it creates space for the kind of well being that can stand the test of time.

Thanks be to God.

¹ Rudolph Bultmann’s description of the “farewell situation” remains a helpful way to frame John’s

² Wendell Berry, *Window Poems* (2003)