

The Good of the Whole

Wayne Waibel – 01/18/2026

And the newly commissioned Messiah begins to assemble His posse. The Baptist's mission has been accomplished. John's realization that he must decrease so Jesus may increase extends to his disciples who have been faithful to him from the beginning. He now directs them to follow Jesus and they oblige.

When we examine the life of Christ there is so much going on in the periphery that it can take a lifetime to get a decent grasp on the countless scenarios that played out around His ministry. John the Baptist spent his entire life in service preparing the way of the Lord. His role was gigantic, and still – he measured himself blessed just to have a role – however brief.

The introduction of Simon who would be called Peter is another pivotal character in the life of Christ. He came to be the rock upon whom the early church would be built. Between Peter and Paul – the entirety of Christendom would hinge.

They would of course be unable to imagine the kind of world we now live in, but I'm quite certain they felt the tremendous weight of seeing to it that the name Jesus Christ would resonate into perpetuity.

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We put a lot of stock in Peter. If I'm not mistaken, he is considered Pope numero uno by no less than 1.2 billion practicing Catholics. And while I won't pretend to be intimate with the history and doctrinal significance of such a station, I can most assuredly appreciate the magnitude.

For me, Peter is a hero. He was flawed and weak. He was prone to anger and did not deal well with controlling it. His heart was large, and he continually strove to do the right thing. He is a constant reminder that it is sufficient to be held within the gaze of the Lord.

The Psalter reminds us that the proper response to God's activity is not only to ponder it in one's heart, but also to tell others. While I'm not sure if Peter did a lot of pondering – he certainly did not withhold the telling others part of the equation. I would suspect that he reached out despite his inclination to withdraw. That's probably why Jesus picked him.

Of this we may be certain - in the postmodern world - life's trials persist. And we continually struggle and sometimes actually overcome. Quite often there is a misstep or regression, but that, too, contributes to the common good. On the cusp of celebrating Martin Luther King Jr. Day, we encounter a very frontal way of recognizing that we still have a long way to go.

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One of the many quotes attributed to the good doctor is his observation that the arch of history bends toward justice. Again – we’re not there yet, but we are trying. One of the qualms that tend to hamper our effort is the reluctance we as humans have for getting to the point. And this is an area that Jesus had absolutely no problem with. It may have had something to do with His divine nature, but I would hope it’s a capacity in each of us as well.

I love that when Christ found he was being followed by a couple of John’s disciples he got right down to it, “What do you seek?” He continually went directly to the heart of the matter, which in turn tended to illicit a cogent and solid response, “Rabbi, where are you staying?” They really didn’t mince words back in the day.

Of course they didn’t – they had important work ahead of them. Then, as now, all of our work, no matter how local, must have the good of the whole as its aim. The message can’t take root unless it rings true with the reality of human experience.

And that experience unfolds every day. I don’t imagine Jesus wasted a single moment, and upon His death, resurrection, and ascension – the disciples maintained that same discipline. They had a church to establish and there were only a handful of them to start with, so there was no room for crybabies.

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Some time ago, I was part of a county mandated training program that dealt with racial equity. I was not excited about it, because I was essentially looking at the business end of a 4-hour meeting. Those of you who have been present at a Session meeting know that my tolerance for meetings has about a 45-minute threshold.

While I understood what was driving this training, I was not thrilled at the prospect of listening to a bunch of people who were in love with the sound of their own voice. Then something strange happened.

I was introduced to a brand-new racial label – European American. I did not like that term – not even a little bit. But as the day wore on, and the term continued to be used by the presenters, it started to lose its edge. By the end of the day - I actually embraced the term. That surprised me.

I'm fairly sure that newfound capacity for tolerance prepared me to be among you. This place is a playground for discovery and learning. You are a congregation constantly engaged in trying to do the right thing, and that extends to the tolerance you consistently display in your interactions with me.

You are firmly rooted in the notion that salvation is maintained as a gift resulting from God's mercy – rather than a prize earned through human achievement. You embrace the charge that we are to live lives that embody Christ, while fully appreciating the fact that we are NOT Christ.

So when I stand here and do my best as a preacher to illuminate and inform the good news of the gospel week in and week out, I do so despite my inadequacies because you make me feel like my best is enough for you.

And my best is what you deserve, because unlike many congregations – you folks truly understand that Godly, Christian critique is always an appeal to receive what has already been given. Amen.