

**September 16, 2011**

***“Echoes of the Heart”***

*Reflections on Life and Community Living*

**Our faith journey—what’s it about?** With our *remembering* of 9/11 coming this weekend and in the grip of all the tension in our nation in recent times, I want to share a Christian vision of *What’s it all about?* with our Laker readers. Although Christian, this vision is not exclusive and has value for people of all faiths.

In the deepest sense—from God’s point of view and from the point of view of the Bible—what it’s all about is LIFE. This is what God is about. God wants us to be alive—alive to the wonder and beauty of creation, alive to love. And God wants us to give LIFE to each other and to the world.

The creation stories of Genesis set the tone for the entire Bible. At every point in the creation story—at the end of the day—God rejoices in what God has created, in the LIFE that God calls into being.

However, with us human beings, things became inexorably more complicated because, in order to increase God’s joy and contentment and to make God’s own life more meaningful, God gave us *free will*, the freedom to choose and to make decisions.

This, of course, opened the door to *sin* because, in our exercise of free will, we don’t always make choices that honor God and bring joy to God’s spirit.

To bend us more towards God’s will, therefore, God formed covenants with us, agreements of mutual commitment to support God’s purposes—the most famous of which are the Ten Commandments.

**The ten Commandments and Jesus.** These Commandments are about LIFE. They’re about honoring and respecting the sacredness of LIFE—apart from which our family and community lives become torn apart and drift easily into waywardness.

These Commandment truths evolved over centuries, each of them having their own complexity, their own story in relation to culture and context. But again, obedience to Commandment (their function) served to sustain LIFE and to protect us from the destructive impulses of *sin*.

All the while—throughout the Bible and throughout our human story over the centuries and the millennia—it’s about LIFE. Still, the *sinful* condition of human kind persisted, as the timeless sins of greed, hunger for power and self-centeredness continued to distort our vision and undermine our choices.

In response to this, God called forth prophet after prophet to be God’s voice, God’s messenger—to call people back into covenantal living, to remind people of the holiness

of LIFE. Nonetheless, sin and waywardness had the upper hand. Finally, perhaps out of compassion and frustration, God came to us in Jesus of Nazareth, whose life God claimed as God's very own life.

As the gospels affirm again and again, this Jesus was the human embodiment of light and love. *Love* is the way LIFE is sustained, revealed through the words and deeds of Jesus from the very heart of God.

Love is the energy that draws all of creation into God's being. It is *the way* LIFE is deepened and sustained, leading to a world of harmony and wholeness. It is what breaks down barriers and reconciles personal differences. *Love* is the language of the poet; it is what fills our music with soul and tenderness. It is what makes life worth living.

**Love is about relationships.** It's about our nurturing and caring for one another; and what's important in our relationships is the SIZE of our spirit.

How *big* a person are we? How *big* a spirit do we have? How open are we to new faces, new relationships, new ideas? How receptive are we to diversity? For us as a people and as individuals, we have to ask ourselves, *How big a world do we want to live in?*

As we reflect on our deep challenges as a nation, let us ask ourselves: *How open and accepting are we of diversity?* Why, you might ask? Because—clearly—the trajectory of the world tilts heavily towards an increasingly diverse world.

As a litmus test for our daily living, if we want to know if something is *of God*, we need only ask ourselves, *Is it life-giving?* Does it *give life* to this situation—to our family, our group, our work place; to our community, our nation our planet?

In the unfolding of our lives, when we are *life-giving* people, we don't act small; we're never petty or filled with revenge. We understand that our lives are about our relationships, that *we may all be one* (John 17:21).

This is God's vision and God's dream for all of creation.