

Between “People” and Clare Voyant

John 17:20-26

A sermon about Christian education

Life puts us in some... let's say curious situations. Last weekend I flew from Portland, Oregon, to Dallas-Fort Worth. That's a 4 hour flight. That's 4 hours of quality time. No phones to answer. No meeting to go to. Four hours of quality time. So how did the middle-aged woman next to me spend her 4 hours? She read **“People” magazine**. You've got to wonder if this woman isn't copping out on the real issues of life. On this flight I had been assigned an aisle seat. That made it easy to notice the name on a flight attendant's apron. First name: Clare. Last name: Voyant. **Clare Voyant**. “Married name?” I asked. She chuckled. It's not her name at all. When she ordered the apron, she requested “Clare Voyant” as a joke. The people who processed her apron order didn't catch it; no one said, “You can't do that.” In fact, she told me, most of the people on airplanes look at it and don't get it. So there I sat with Clare Voyant on the left and the “People” magazine reader on my right, **between a person who knew enough to be cynical about people and a person who seemed to be copping out of real-life issues. Such a place to be!**

It's easy to be cynical or to cop out. The “flight of life” is putting us in the middle of some situations that are troubling. Take, for example, unprecedented **bioethical questions**. A laboratory in Chicago is producing human embryos for parents who have a sick child. If an embryo has the right DNA, it is implanted, a new child born, and the stem cells from the umbilical cord are used to treat the sick sibling. A child is produced, not for the child's sake but to be used for another. And what will happen to the unused embryos? Such a “flight” we're on! What do we do, become cynical about “right to lifers?” or know nothing because we've copped out?

More and more we're facing **moral questions**. Adam and Steve can now be declared married in some places. Media coverage is leading many people to think that this may be acceptable in our society. What are you going to do when Adam and Steve want “their” child baptized here at your church? What are you going to do when Adam and Steve want to enroll “their” child in your Lutheran school? Again, such a “flight” we're on in the 21st century! What do we do, be cynical about gays or straights (take your choice) or know nothing because we've copped out on current issues?

One more example, something you know about and have probably struggled with in some way, the **dissolution of the traditional family**. Many children are growing up in single-parent homes. 12.5% of Americans live in poverty. Addiction and abuse seem to be more common than ever. At least they are more known than ever. Public school systems, try as they do, sometimes seem to be struggling against insurmountable odds to give our children a chance. What to do? Would that we really were clairvoyant! Would that life was nothing more than a slick, glossy magazine!

That's not the way it is. Something else that isn't is this: God hasn't planted a spirit of cynicism or copping out in us but God has planted in us a spirit of communion with Himself. In all these difficult situations, you and I yearn for an intimate communion with God. **My prayer, Jesus said, is that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in us....** Can there be anything more soul-satisfying than such an intimate

communion with God? Being one with God who made us to be His own? Being one with God who has proven Himself a forgiving Father to us sinners? Being one with Jesus who not only earned your forgiveness but offers you abundant life now and unending life in heaven? **With cynicism on one side and copping out on the other, what could be more soul-satisfying than being one with God? That's the goal of Christian education.** It's God's way of leading us to satisfying union with Him, to saving and instructive oneness with Him, for all of us whose heads are tempted to be turned by cynicism or copping out.

This oneness with God...again, that's the goal of Christian education... This oneness with God changes people. On July 23, 2002 **Roberta Kitchen testified before the Committee on Education and the Workforce** of the U.S. House of Representatives. Here's part of her testimony.

When a family friend living on the streets strung out on drugs and alcohol asked me to take in her three children, I did. A few years later, two more babies arrived. Seemingly overnight I had become a single mother of five, and I had to find a way to educate them, to give them a chance to break the cycle of poverty and despair into which they had been born. I didn't take the kids just to lose them.

The public schools in the Collinwood section of Cleveland, infested with drugs and crime, were not an answer, although I've tried. Tiffany, my eldest, was promoted to the sixth grade, despite not being able to read. When I asked that she be allowed to repeat the sixth grade, I was informed she could not.... At that same school, one of Tiffany's teachers had her arm broken by a student who then threatened rape.

With five children, money was a barrier to escaping the public schools. I went from private school to private school, asking about tuition and everything else. I became a beggar for my children. I took on a second job, but without enough time to care for my children, I was forced to quit. I offered my clerical skills in exchange for reduced tuition, anything to get my kids into a good school. It was the lowest point in my whole life.

When Toshika, my youngest, won a tuition voucher through Cleveland's new school choice program, I could finally breath a little easier. In her six years at St. John Nottingham, a Lutheran school, she has always been on the honor or merit roll, the teachers know her, and she is happy. I couldn't – and still can't – understand why some people worry more about a cross on the wall than the drug dealers on the block or the prostitutes up the road.

The cross on the wall and drug dealers on the block and prostitutes up the road. What a “flight” we're on! “Oh, isn't that nice that the children learn about Jesus.” With all the problems around us, we all, whatever our age, we all need that cross on the wall of our hearts. **When the cross goes from being a nice decoration on a wall to what's in your heart, you're one with God and with the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ. That not only puts you on a “flight” to heaven, but out of that comes guidance for the tough issues that we face here on earth.** When you *seek first His kingdom and His righteousness*, other things will be added to you as well (Matthew 6:33). Other things like guidance in the tough issues of life, be they bioethical, moral, family, or what have you. *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness* (2 Timothy 3:16). That's the curriculum of Christian education. No cynicism. No copping out. Eyes on God for heaven and guidance for earth. ***Father, I want those You have given Me to be with Me.***

How do I motivate you, whatever your age, to be actively seeking this union with God, to become one with God through His Word? Perhaps a story will help. Several months ago I lead a pastors' conference in another state, a state that was having a democratic primary. Surprise, candidate Howard Dean was appearing at a rally right in our conference hotel. Guess how many of those 31 pastors bothered to go? Not one. I wonder how stimulating their sermons are. **The best motivation I can give you for getting personally involved in heavenly-oriented but earthly-practical Christian education is to see what's really happening in the world.** Get to know the struggles of the Roberta Kitchens of our country. Acquaint yourself with the unprecedented questions of bioethics and morality and all the other tough issues facing us. Do it with constant reference, constant reference to the God who is united with you through the Word of Jesus Christ. When life assigns you a seat between cynicism and copping out, keep your eyes straight on God. He's giving you the optimistic Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead. What a flight this is! Amen.

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