

## Lenten Reflection

Delivered by Ben Krueger, February 29, 2008

Two years ago this March, I took written comprehensive exams required for my master's degree. This much-dreaded graduate school rite of passage inspired considerable anxiety and many sleepless nights. In the weeks leading up to the exam, the history of communication from Aristotle to Abraham Lincoln to Michel Foucault swirled through my mind. The night before my exams, I called an old friend and asked her, "do you have any last-minute words of wisdom?"

"Be brilliant," she replied.

"That's it?" I said.

"Well," she said, "I figured it sounded more encouraging than don't write anything stupid."

The moral of this story is that simple advice can sometimes be the most difficult to digest. In the same vein, today's Gospel seems simple at first glance. Jesus offers two commandments—first, "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, and with all your strength," and second, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." Yet these commandments easier said than lived.

For me, loving the Lord my God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength is challenging business. When everyone from Friedrich Nietzsche to Elton John

proclaims that God is dead and when my colleagues in academia believe that the *Left Behind* series sums up Christianity, it's easy to pretend that God exists only on Sundays and only on the corner of Albemarle and 42<sup>nd</sup> Street Northwest. It's easy to lose sight of the role of love in the Christian tradition and to instead think of God as a vengeful tax collector who will come to audit us on the April 15<sup>th</sup> to end all April 15ths.

Loving my neighbor as myself is even more challenging. Our neighbors include our family, friends, and co-workers. But our neighbors are homeless meth addicts, prostitutes, and violent prison inmates. They all deserve our love and compassion, but showing them compassion without being judgmental is difficult.

I believe the first step to being more compassionate is to rethink how we view Christianity. As Marcus Borg writes in his book *The Heart of Christianity*: “taking the God of love and justice and the God of grace seriously has immediate implications for the Christian message. It becomes: God loves us already and has from our very beginning. The Christian life is not about believing or doing what we need to believe or do so that we can be saved. Rather, it's about seeing what is already true—that God loves us already—and then beginning to live in this relationship. It's about becoming conscious of and intentional about a deepening relationship with God.”

As we go forward in this season of Lent, let us keep the big picture in mind:  
God loves us, and always has. Amen.