

“Overflowing with Honor”  
II Corinthians 5:16-21  
Wayne Eberly  
November 14, 2021

Ambassador  
(joke)  
Clay jars  
(story of jar)  
II Corinthians comfort  
Shoes...Guidepost  
Ambassador (Great honor)  
Jim Harbaugh...Head coach  
Wig...  
Jackson and friends

There is a story out of India which tells of a servant whose daily task was carry water from the well to his master’s house. Every day he carried the water in two earthen jars attached to a yoke which rested on his shoulders. However, the jar on his left was cracked so that by the time he got to the master’s house half of the water had leaked out. Whereas, the other jar was perfect and arrived full. The good jar was proud, but the cracked jar felt sad and inferior.

Finally, after years of arriving half-empty and feeling guilty, the clay jar that was cracked apologized to the water-bearer. “I’m sorry that I couldn’t accomplish what the perfect jar did.”

The water-bearer said, “What do you have to apologize for?” The pot responded, “All this time, I still only deliver half my load of water. I make more work for you because of my flaw.”

The man smiled and told the pot, “Look at the side of the path where I carried you. Notice all the flowers growing there, the flowers grew so beautiful because of the water you leaked. There are no flowers on the

perfect pot's side." The servant who carried the water had noticed the crack years before and had used the flaw to bring beauty in a way that would not otherwise have been possible.

### Jim Hartung story

Anyway, this week I wanted to have a little fun with the men. They know I'm from California, and they can tease me pretty good about it. So, I beat them to the punch. I asked them about that song Tony Bennett made famous about the city by the Bay. I asked what they thought it meant when Tony sang, "I left my heart in San Francisco." Is the song about a person he left in San Francisco, a relationship he left behind, or is it maybe about the city itself, the Golden Gate Bridge or Park, the waterfront, the view of Alcatraz and Cable Cars. What the men didn't know was I was using San Francisco as a way to introduce something else from that city into the discussion.

What I really wanted to talk about was the San Francisco 49ers. Things are going pretty good for the 49ers these last few years, playoffs, and a Super Bowl appearance. Their head coach is becoming well-known as well. His name is Jim Harbaugh. He is so well-known that Sports Illustrated ran a lengthy article about him a few weeks ago. Jim Harbaugh is an intense coach. You see it in his face, in how he shakes hands with other coaches after games, and his passion for perfection. So, the headline on the cover said, "Jim Harbaugh is softer—and saner—than you think".

Softer and saner. That piqued my interest. The article begins by telling about a person Jim Harbaugh greatly admires. The man is named Father Joseph Uhen. Father Joseph is a graduate of Notre Dame, and for the last twenty years he has pastored a parish in a city in northern Peru. "There, in outlying villages without sewers or running water, Uhen has built 28 chapels, and he ministers to some 40,000 faithfuls." It turns out Jim Harbaugh is a devout Catholic, and for the last five years he takes a week during the off-season and he spends time with Father Joseph in Peru, "doing the mission's work—delivering food to the

needy, helping out at an orphanage or building bamboo houses....Father Jose, as Uhen is known by his flock, has seen Harbaugh literally give villagers the shirt (and hoodie) off his back. He has a picture of the coach walking out of a prison in his stocking feet; Harbaugh had befriended an inmate and given the man his shoes. Uhen recalls delivering food to a house where another old man lay on the dirt floor, near death. Harbaugh gently picked him up and carried him to a car.”

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I had started our discussion about Tony Bennett singing, “I left my heart in San Francisco.” Now we found out Jim Harbaugh, coach of the football team from San Francisco, has a special place in his heart for the people of Peru. In fact, Jim Harbaugh has literally left his shoes in a prison in Peru. What I really wanted to know from the men this past Tuesday, and what I really want to know from you, is whether there are some places where you have left your shoes? Are there some places you have left your heart? Are there some places that you have realized waiting on tables is not something delegated or relegated, but waiting on tables is something in the kingdom of Heaven that is elevated, that is sacred, holy, and because it is sacred and holy it touches the deepest place in your heart.

Ambassador

Danger...tell joke about great, great, man

Legitimate danger

Disciples...

Paul has his own ability to deflate (clay jars)

Honor...we are ambassadors

We carry a message

We carry a treasure (Holy Spirit)

We are new creation

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<sup>1</sup> Article by Austin Murphy in Sports Illustrated, December 9, 2013, p. 48.

We proclaim hope

We understand greatness

We

Richard Mouw...President of seminary; St. Giles and Alpha preacher,  
Adrienne, Ginny Johnson

Professor

Wig

We live in a special relationship

Some people take the *I* in life and make that the defining characteristic of life. *I* means that I am the center of life, my needs, my wants, my success, my agenda, my comfort, and my concerns. We become self-centered and self-reliant. Making life all about the *I*, is fraught with problems. I love the quip that says, "The only problem with the self-made man is that he is only as good as his maker." Whenever I get to thinking I am hot stuff, I remember the story of the man who was receiving an honorary degree at a great university. The president introduced him by saying, "The man we are honoring today is a great man. You might say he's a very great man. I would even say he is a very, very great man." As he drove home the man turned to his wife and said, "Dear, how many very, very great men do you think there are in the world?" She said, "One less than you think, dear." (Luke, The Communicator's Commentary, p. 281, Bruce Larson) Even though I tell that joke, I don't know whether to laugh or cry about how inflated the *I* has become in our society. The gentleness, the peace, the joy, the choosing of right, the doing of the noble, and so much more that Paul wrote about in what truly makes life meaningful is cast aside when we put *I* on the throne. To say nothing of pushing God, the true Lord of life, to the fringes.

In Edinburgh we visited the home of John Knox. John Knox really laid the groundwork for what we know as the Presbyterian Church. One

of his most well-known quotes says, "Give me Scotland or I die." His passion to know Christ and to make Christ known is an inspiring witness. Knox served at the St. Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh. On a cold Saturday afternoon, I was walking down what is called the Royal Mile, the ancient street which passes by St. Giles Cathedral. A man was standing outside the cathedral with a sign. The sign said, "John 3:16." After he set up the sign, he plugged in a small amplifier. Then he took a microphone, and began to talk, right there on the street corner. He stood out like a sore thumb.

I watched with curiosity as he began to talk. Unlike some street preachers who rant and rave, ones who focus on judgment and condemnation, this man simply began to speak in a quiet and calm voice about the love of God. Folks would look at him as they walked by, read the sign, and keep moving. Many shook their heads. Others awkwardly avoided any eye contact. More than a few laughed as they walked on. But one man heard him and stopped. One man sat down about fifteen feet away from him and listened. As this man listened, he bowed his head and began to pray. That man was me.

I prayed that these words of love would not be ridiculed, would not be laughed at, and most importantly, would not be ignored. I prayed that these words of love would find a home in people's heart. As he patiently shared the good news about Jesus to all who passed by, I thought of how the Apostle Paul said that in so many ways, we are fools for Christ. We preach a message that can sound strange, outdated, and irrelevant. We stand on street corners in busy and modern cities and tell a story about a Jewish man who lived 2,000 years ago. And he wasn't a king. He wasn't powerful. He wasn't rich. And all he did was die a humiliating death. Stand on a street corner and share that message and you can begin to feel like a fool. Except for one thing. Except for this one thing. Jesus Christ was God's beloved Son, and by the time God raised him from the dead and exalted him to the highest place in heaven, we realize he was the King of kings and the Lord of lords; we realize he has all power and authority on heaven and on

earth; we realize all the riches belong to him; and although his death was humiliating, he is now worshiped with the deepest reverence and the most cherished devotion. So even though the world might say we are fools for Christ, we say our greatest desire in life, our highest purpose, our fervent passion is to know Christ. We just want to know Christ.

While I was in Scotland, and while I was thinking about people who had followed Christ and served Christ and sacrificed for Christ, all because they wanted to know Christ, I came across an article. The timing of the article couldn't have been more perfect, especially as I thought of that lonely figure outside St. Giles Cathedral, holding a sign that said *John 3:16*, and quietly and patiently telling others about the love of God. The article was by Richard Mouw, who at the time was President of Fuller Seminary, the large, non-denominational seminary in Pasadena, California.

In the article, Richard Mouw tells about giving an address at a conference focused on *the Abrahamic religions*. His message to the conference concluded by reflecting on two aspects of his own faith.

***The first involved an encounter I had recently witnessed between a Jew and a Muslim. About thirty or so American religious leaders representing Christianity, Judaism, and Islam had the privilege of a closed-door session with King Abdullah of Jordan on one of his visits to the United States. We were impressed by the Arab leader's professed commitment to encouraging fellow Muslims to cooperate with Jews and Christians in countering the toxic influence of extremists in each of our communities. His responses to probing questions were equally impressive-indeed, they were often quite inspiring.***

***As our session neared its conclusion, an elderly rabbi asked for a final word. He told the king that he was deeply moved by what he had shared. "We need you in our world of turmoil today, but I worry about your safety and the safety and well-being of your family." He pledged to pray for King Abdullah and his loved ones. And then the rabbi offered, as a fellow descendent of Abraham, the well-known ancient***

***blessing. “The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you, and give you peace.”***

***I told my audience how moved I was by that encounter. As an evangelical Christian, I said, I believe with all my heart that the God I worship, the God of Abraham, looked down on that scene and smiled.***

***But then I quickly moved to the second aspect that I needed to share. “Those of you who watch professional football games know that there is often somebody in the crowd right behind the goalposts who holds up a John 3:16 sign. I need to tell you this: That’s me!” I find I need to live with some mystery about what God is doing in the Abrahamic religions. At the same time, I cannot fail to proclaim the John 3:16 message that God has sent a Savior, and that those who believe on him will not perish but have everlasting life.<sup>2</sup>***

Perhaps now more than ever we need Christians who will respect and honor and learn from and pray for those of different religions. We need bridge builders. We need peacemakers. We need Christians who practice forbearance and kindness to those who believe differently than us. And yet the second part of what Dr. Mouw said is equally important. Now more than ever we need followers of Jesus Christ who hold up that crazy sign that says John 3:16. And we need Christians who not only hold up a sign about John 3:16, we need Christians who live out that love in this world, not just for the sake of love, not just for the sake of world peace, but for the sake of Jesus Christ. We need Christians whose burning desire is to say what Paul said 2,000 years ago, “I want to know Christ.” To know Christ is to live for him and through him and in him as his love shapes and molds and transforms our lives into his image. So, I finished reading Richard Mouw’s article and I thought about John Knox and Dr. Livingstone and a lonely figure holding a sign outside St. Giles Cathedral and I realized that even though I haven’t obtained it and haven’t reached the goal, I want to

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Mouw, *Christianity Today*, April 2008, 47.

know Christ. I want to pour my life out in pursuit of knowing him better and better, in ways that are deeper and deeper, with a heart that is purer and purer. That guy with the wig and the sign that says John 3:16, that's me. That's me.

If I have to, I will wear a wig and hold a sign that says John 3:16. I'll do whatever it takes. I want to know Christ. I want others to know Christ. By the grace of God, people do know Christ.

I don't want to leave scars. I want to respect and learn from brothers and sisters of different faith traditions. I want to leave judgment in God's hands. But I don't want to be silent about the very thing that has been revealed to me, and to you. I want to wear a rainbow wig. I want to hold up a sign that says John 3:16. I want to let the world know about a precious gift that has been given.

Ok. Maybe I don't want to wear the wig. But I do want to hold up the sign.

On our trip, we visited Edinburgh, home of St. Giles Cathedral, where John Knox served as minister, and where he was later buried. On a cold Saturday afternoon, I was walking down what is called the Royal Mile, the ancient street which passes by St. Giles Cathedral. A man was standing outside the cathedral with a sign. The sign said, "John 3:16." After he set up the sign, he plugged in a small amplifier. Then he took a microphone, and began to talk, right there on the street corner. He didn't have a wig, but he stood out like a sore thumb.

He began to talk. Unlike some street preachers who rant and rave, who focus on judgment and condemnation, this man simply began to speak in a quiet and calm voice about the love of God. Folks would look at him as they walked by, read the sign, and keep moving. Many shook their heads. Others awkwardly avoided any eye contact. More than a few laughed as they walked on. But one man heard him and stopped. One man sat down about fifteen feet away from him and listened. As this man listened, he bowed his head and began to pray. That man was me.

I prayed that these words of love would not be ridiculed, would not be laughed at, and most importantly, would not be ignored. I prayed that these words of love would find a home in people's heart.

I had a reason for praying that prayer. At the bottom of his sign about John 3:16 was an invitation to learn about the Alpha Course. Through Alpha, our congregation has been blessed, and lives have been changed.

In fact, one of the travelers on our trip was Adrienne Buscher. Adrienne came to Pines through Alpha. Just a few days before she was recounting how God has totally transformed her life. She was beaming as she spoke. One of the great gifts of Adrienne's life is that she has come to realize God's judgment has been revealed in grace, through the precious blood of Jesus. Now her life, flowing over with that love, is spreading love to others. This John 3:16 is real. God's gift really is precious. It is love. And it makes a difference for all eternity.

I don't know if I'm supposed to wear this crazy wig. I don't know if I'm supposed to walk around holding up a sign that says John 3:16. All I know is this. God's love is real. It is so real I don't have to take it upon myself to judge others and how they live or what they believe. God's love is so real, all I have to do is accept that love for what it is, the most precious gift ever given to human beings. And as I accept that gift, to let God's love fill me up and flow over into the life I live. As Peter said, "with sincere love for your brothers and sisters, love one another deeply, from the heart." May God give us the strength to be faithful to this call.