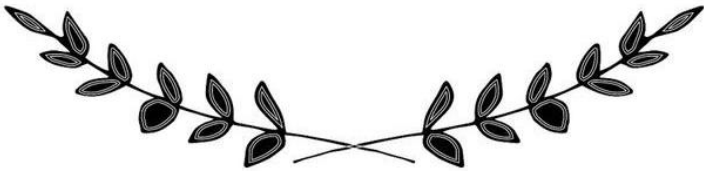


family

TOGETHER

we have it all



IDOLS

REPLACEMENTS FOR GOD

FAMILIAR IDOLS

IDOLS AND OUR LOSSES

Read Acts 19:23-27

This amazing story about Paul's interaction with people who worshiped the Greek goddess Artemis. They recognize what is at stake with "The Way" (an early name for Christianity), and it is life as they have known it.

When we start to talk about idols, we might recognize things that make us uncomfortable for perhaps some of the same reasons that the Ephesians were uncomfortable. Some of that discomfort may come at the loss of our personal gain (i.e. selling statues) or at simply the loss of the idol (i.e. "that she may be deposed from her significance").

IDOL TESTS

We would do well to review some definitions and tests for idols and idolatry when it comes to our cultural idols. Keep in mind that idols are largely "made of good things" like the statues of Artemis were made from silver and skilled craftsmanship – but the problem is assigning divine things to them.

The first of our idol tests comes from Luther's explanation of the First Commandment ("You shall have no other gods before me."): "We should fear, love and trust in God above all things." Hence, an idol is something that garners more of our fear, love, and trust than God.

The second idol test comes more in terms of what we believe an idol is providing. We believe that God provides us with identity, security, and meaning. An idol then is something that provides more identity than God, or more security than God, and gives our lives more meaning than God does.

The last idol test is a new one for today and deals more with our idol worship than our identification of an idol. All idols point back to our own sin and refusal of God, but these point back to activities that may show our misplaced trusts:

- We allow idols to tell us that we are enough (or not enough). We either spurn God's Law (you are not enough), or God's Gospel (you are enough).
- We allow idols to absolve us. We seek absolution (while not necessarily forgiveness) from idols, the transactions from incomplete to whole.
- We make idols the way through which we gain transcendence. We look to idols as a way to get beyond the mundane realities of life to some other plane.
- We form worshipful rituals around our idols. We find facsimiles of our religious worship life including congregations of the like-believing, offerings and sacrifices, calls to faith, and evangelism.

It may be worth mentioning that our false idols are almost always reflections of ourselves, if not simply just disguised avatars for worshipping ourselves.

THE FAMILY ALTAR

In various kinds of religious systems, you will find a "family altar," a place that is designated as a worshipful space for prayers, devotions, and other religious practices. You could say that in some ways we haven't lost the family altar, but that we have simply expanded the family altar to include the entire home and the people living in it.

This is hardly a new human occurrence. You could even say that a part of the problem with the original sins of Adam and Eve is that they (especially Adam) put family before God. And as good as family is, it still lets us down, which makes it a deceptively dangerous God.

The image from the front of our handout today actually says it well. This was the first (and by way of understanding Google, therefore the most relevant or popular) image that showed up in the search results. It simply reads "Family: Together, we have it all."

ROMANCE

Sociologists will be happy to inform us that while romantic love has almost always been a part of human culture, it has not necessarily been a prerequisite to marriage. Instead, marriage was seen as an arrangement for primarily pragmatic and economic concerns – offspring, survival, land, political association. This is referred to by experts as “marriage of reason.”

On the other side of the coin we have “marriage of instinct,” which spurns much reason and strategy for sentiment and emotion. Attraction and desire are what draws us to the altar here.

Renowned marriage therapist Esther Perel points out that a particular modern dysfunction is not that our marriages are one or another of these options, but that they are both: “We come to one person, and we are basically asking them to give us what once an entire village used to provide: give me belonging, give me identity, give me continuity, but give me transcendence, mystery and awe all in one. Give me comfort, give me edge. Give me novelty, give me familiarity. Give me predictability, give me surprise.”

The burden of such romantic relationships may be difficult for our partners, but they are often most felt by ourselves. In situations where we are expected to be Disney princesses and princes, the personal struggle may be too great for our own lives.

PARENTING

One particularly abrasive text about the celebration of Christmas made the following point, “We love Christmas so much because it simply reinforces the idea that our children will be our salvation.” That might be a little harsh, but there is some truth that resonates in it for many parents. Largely the idol of parenting serves two notions: the idea that the parent gains immortality through a copy of themselves who will live beyond them, and the idea that their self worth is tied up in the raising of a functioning child. Either of these can lead to interesting religious experiences for the parent that don’t need to include God, unless He is simply a means to one of the ends above.