

### 3.6.2022 Lent 1

Here's a term you might not be familiar with: mondegreen. A mondegreen is a misheard word or phrase that makes complete sense in your head, but is in fact incorrect. It was author Sylvia Wright who coined this term back in 1954, when she wrote an article about a phrase she misheard in her childhood. The article told the story of her mother reading to her from a book called *Reliques of Ancient Verse*. Her favorite poem from the book went like this: "Ye Highlands and Ye Lowlands, Oh where have you been? They have slain the Earl of Moray, And laid him on the green." Sylvia Wright, however, heard the last line as: "They have slain the Earl of Moray, And Lady Mondegreen." The phrase makes sense, it's just not correct.

In mishearing phrases, children have created some memorable mondegreens, such as, the little girl who asked her mother if she'd ever seen a consecrated cross-eyed bear. She asked the question after hearing a hymn that began with the phrase: "A consecrated cross I bear." Another child, a very hard-working boy, would end his prayer not with: "Forever and ever. Amen." But instead, "Forever endeavor. Amen." And there was the little girl who, when praying the Hail Mary, instead of saying, "Blessed art thou amongst women," would say, "Blessed art thou, a monk swimming."

Mondegreens are common in the English language, and a place where we find them very often is in song. We can probably all think of a few times when we've misheard a singer, and ended up inserting into the song a sensible, but incorrect lyric. This has been my experience over the last few months with a song played on Christian radio titled *Better Word*. Here's the way I misheard the first few lines: Your love is healing every wound. Your love is making all things new. Your love speaks a better word. Your love, the measure of my worth. Your love, more than I deserve. Your love speaks a better word.

That sounds correct, doesn't it? God's love is healing every wound and making all things new. His love is the measure of our worth and infinitely more than we deserve. The lyric makes perfect sense, but it's not correct. Listen to the difference between what I misheard, and what was actually being said about our Savior Christ, "Your blood is healing every wound. Your blood is making all things new. Your blood speaks a better word. Your

blood, the measure of my worth. Your blood, more than I deserve. Your blood speaks a better word” (Hebrews 12:24).

Oswald Chambers once wrote, “We can understand the attributes of God in other ways, but we can only understand the Father’s heart through the Cross of Christ.” It’s true that the person who has eyes to see and ears to hear can gain understanding of God’s attributes in many ways. Philosophy and science, creation and history, theology and most importantly, Divine Revelation. These things all help us understand that God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and perfectly good. These attributes, and other attributes of God, are discovered in many and various ways, but the Father’s heart, the height and depth and breadth and length of His Divine love (Ephesians 3:18), can only begin to be understood through the blood which was poured out for us on the Cross, and Lent is a 40-day opportunity to reflect more carefully and more deliberately on that truth.

In the past we’ve talked about theologians like Soren Kierkegaard, St. Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas, who believed that Almighty God, by His Infinite power, could have chosen any number of ways to accomplish His goal of redeeming the world. In his work, *On the Trinity* (8:10), Augustine said it this way, “Other possible means were not lacking on God’s part, because all things are equally subject to His power,” or in other words, from the Gospel according to St. Luke, “*Nothing is impossible for God!*” (Luke 1:37 CEV).

In the season of Lent, as we reflect more carefully and more deliberately on the Passion of Christ, the thought that a Sovereign and Omnipotent God certainly could have chosen another way, leads us to wonder why He chose the Way of the Cross, why God chose not only the love, but the Blood of His Son to be the measure of our worth. Why would God choose to redeem the world in a way that would leave Him abandoned by almost all of His friends, nailed to a Cross, and crying out, “*My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?*” (Matthew 27:46) as He suffered in excruciating ways that we cannot even begin to fathom.

Only God knows why He sent His Son to walk the Way of the Cross, but as we reflect on a decision that was made “*before the foundation of the world*”

(Revelation 13:8), we come to understand that the infinite wisdom, power, and most especially, the love of God, are manifested in that decision, a decision that led to the Passion and Death of His Son; but this thought seems counterintuitive, doesn't it? The thought that the all-knowing, all-powerful, all-loving God of Heaven and Earth could have chosen another way to save us, and yet out of all the possible options, the option that God chose was the one which led His Son to be "*pierced for our transgressions,*" and "*crushed for our sins*" (Isaiah 53:5).

In the struggle to make sense of our thoughts about why God would choose such an agonizingly painful way for His beloved Son, again St. Augustine helps us find an answer. He wrote, "For what else could have been so necessary to build up our hope, and to free the minds of mortals despairing because of their mortality, than that God should show us how highly he valued us, and how greatly he loved us? And what could be more clear and evident proof of God's great love than that the Son of God... so undeserving of evil, should bear our evils?"

St. Augustine believed that God could have found another way to save us, but knew that "we can only understand the Father's heart through the Cross of Christ." Out of all the possible options, God chose this way because He wants you to know Him, and He wants you to know, with complete certainty, the unimaginable depth of His love for you. The Cross of Christ is an invitation from God the Father, through His Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to you; an invitation to know His heart, to know how He loves. By offering the greatest gift He had to give, His Son, God may have left a measure of mystery about His *ways* (Isaiah 55:8), but He removed all doubt about His love for you. Augustine believed that in choosing this way to manifest His love for the world, the Father builds up our hope, saves us from despair, shows us our infinite value to Him, and how greatly He loves us.

The Cross of Christ reveals the height and depth and breadth and length of God's love for us. When we hear those familiar words which tell us "*God so loved the world,*" we should bring to mind the Cross, for it is on the Cross that we find the measure of God's love: "*His only Son...*" (John 3:16). In this season of Lent and for the rest of our days, may the measure of God's love for the world stir us to respond in love, to give our selves, our souls and

bodies to Him in return, by taking up our cross daily and following His perfect and painful example of *how to love* in this broken world. The Cross is our example of how to love one another as the Father, through the Son, by the power of the Spirit, loves us.