

One Plus One Plus One Equals One Psalm 27
Saint Marks United Methodist Church, Charleston, WV 3rd Sunday after the Epiphany [January 26] 2014

27 ¹ The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

² When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall. ³ Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident.

⁴ One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.

⁵ For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock.

⁶ And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the LORD.

⁷ Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud; be gracious to me and answer me!

⁸ You have said, "Seek my face."

My heart says to you, "Your face, LORD, do I seek." ⁹ Hide not your face from me. Turn not your servant away in anger, O you who have been my help. Cast me not off; forsake me not, O God of my salvation!

¹⁰ For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the LORD will take me in.

¹¹ Teach me your way, O LORD, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies. ¹² Give me not up to the will of my adversaries; for false witnesses have risen against me, and they breathe out violence.

¹³ I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living!

¹⁴ Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!

Not everyone is as blessed as Larry to have an Uncle Wendell, the retired missionary, who had become a regular fixture in his life. Uncle Wendell's mission had been overrun once by "men with a cause" who had done horrific things. And, Uncle Wendell had gone through a long bout with cancer. But through all these things, Uncle Wendell's mantra had always been, ***"The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"***

When Larry was old enough, he realized that Uncle Wendell's stand-by phrase was the first verse of Psalm 27. He knew from the facts of Uncle Wendell's life that Psalm 27 was more literal for him than for most people.

Because it was so important to Uncle Wendell, it became important for Larry. One day he asked the question, "Uncle Wendell, it says in verse 4 that the psalmist seeks after JUST ONE THING in his life. And then he goes on to describe THREE THINGS, NOT ONE."

"Ah, Larry, you are wise beyond your years. What are those three things?"

“He asks, first, to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life. Then, secondly, he asks to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord; and finally, thirdly, he asks to inquire in the Lord’s temple.”

“You pay attention well, Larry. I am proud of you. To solve this riddle, you only need to know the key, which is **1 + 1 + 1 = 1.**”

Uncle Wendell must have seen the look on Larry’s face, when he said this. He put his hand gently on Larry’s shoulder, and said, “If this doesn’t make sense now, that’s OK. Just ***wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!***”

And that was all that Uncle Wendell had to say about that.

If it had not been for the fact that Uncle Wendell’s life stood as a testimony for the reliability of ***"The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"*** then Larry might not have given it another thought. But, as it was, Uncle Wendell was a very important part of Larry’s life and he continued to chew on that math problem for years. Not obsess about it; but never let it go.

As the years went, Larry fell in love with a lovely woman, whose name was Merriweather. He asked Uncle Wendell to marry them in the local church. Uncle Wendell said he was honored so to do. He preached a little homily at the wedding, in which he used the text of Mark 10:7-9:

7 “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, 8 and the two shall become one.” So they are no longer two but one. 9 What therefore God has joined together, let no one separate.

And Uncle Wendell had preached the text something like this:

And so, it is, Merriweather and Larry, hear that Jesus was teaching a new form of math. He taught that – WITH LOVE: $1 + 1 = 1$. The 2 become as 1.

In the excitement, passion and grandeur of that moment, Larry was, understandably, not making any connection from that wedding homily to the years old teaching about Psalm 27.

The point Uncle Wendell wanted them to understand was that REAL LOVE – NOT LOVE IN THE ABSTRACT, BUT IN RELATIONSHIP – changes things into something completely new, even the numbers in a simple arithmetic formula.

But, sometimes things happen in life that register, or “click” on a deeper level that is not always noticed at the surface level – not right then.

Two years went by. Uncle Wendell’s cancer had returned, or a new one had come. His body was in the process of dying. Although his outer body was wasting away, his inner being still shone brilliantly, with the embodiment of his affirmation of faith: ***"The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"***

And it was that same two years later, when Larry and Merriweather were blessed with the birth of a daughter. Larry asked, and Merriweather consented, that they name her “Wendy.” Shortly after coming home from the hospital, they took Wendy to visit her namesake. Uncle Wendell was now mostly confined to bed. But he was able to hold the small infant in his arms for a few moments.

Larry said, “Uncle Wendell, her name is Wendy. And I want you to know that I understand who we are: Merriweather, Wendy, and I; we are $1 + 1 + 1$ and we equal 1.”

Uncle Wendell smiled, and said, “Indeed you are. Indeed you are. REAL LOVE – NOT LOVE IN ABSTRACT, BUT IN RELATIONSHIP – changes things into something completely new, even the math.”

At the Church Leadership Retreat yesterday, there were some people who understood how *dwelling in the house of the Lord all the days of their life*, plus *gazing upon the beauty of the Lord*, and finally, thirdly, *inquiring in the Lord’s temple* are really ONE THING and not THREE.

It is not any superior, or novel, intellectual ability that explains the formula $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$. Rather, it is a real, tangible, personal relationship with Jesus that makes it happen. Then things move from truth in the abstract to a truth that becomes a new reality and a new way to see life.

There are others, for whom “ $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$ ” sounds plain silly. That’s OK. Remember what Uncle Wendell told Larry: “Just *wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!*”

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.