

Windows on the Water

By Andrew Comiskey



With pleasure, I submit to you the best of my blogs, in the eyes of the DSM/LW staff. The following may help distill what we are about—what best defines our ‘water’ world. I could not be more pleased that my colleagues made these selections out of hundreds of choices. I will briefly summarize their import. Enjoy.

The first selection—‘Love’—is a simple meditation on Jesus’ self-giving. Love Himself gave all to gain us. We have hope because God made Himself known to us in Jesus. Our response to ‘Love’ is prayer, so the next selection is fittingly: ‘Why Pray?’ Desert Stream is essentially a prayer ministry. We as a staff start each day in prayer, often end our day together in prayer, and sponsor two 40-day prayer/fasting times annually. All our pastoral care efforts begin and end with prayer. Prayer conveys the truth that without Him, we can do nothing (John 15:5).

We pray that we might reflect Jesus in our sexual lives, namely the beauty and strength of His holiness, or chastity. ‘Beauty Trumps Brokenness’ highlights how beautiful Jesus calls all persons, regardless of their starting points, onto chastity. That levels the playing field (no-one greater than another) on which Jesus meets us in an intimate bond of love. United with Him, we begin to integrate our longing for meaningful human connection with our hunger for God.

‘Contending for the Bride’ is a prophetic declaration of our mission: we are called to champion her—the Church—as the purveyor and provider of chastity through helping her members find godly freedom in their sexual and relational selves. The world is getting more fractured all the time; we the Church must become radiantly whole in our embrace of the broken. An example of that ‘embrace’ lies in ‘Letter to a Vulnerable Friend’ in which I advise Christian friends of the ‘transgendered’ to love with reason and truth those tormented by popular lies. This is the Church’s hour to shine for the dignity of a generation at-risk.

‘Struck Down, Deployed’ describes how God uses loved ones’ bad choices to convert us: to render us both candidates and conduits of Living Waters for others. Lastly, ‘The Nations Return’ describes God’s severe mercy in breaking apart the old world of Living Waters in order to give us a smaller yet truer one. We as a ministry died and now live to change the world. **DSM**



Love

GOD GAVE EVERYTHING FOR US AT CALVARY. He poured out His life, which is the best definition of love I know. We have all (I hope) known someone who sacrificed for us. But he or she did not give everything. God did. He died for us.

He died for us in order to gain us: He died to draw near to us, to be with us, to calm us with His Presence, to speak words we can hear, to nourish us with His body and blood. He 'who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see' (1 Tim. 6:16) humbled Himself in His Son and came closer to us than a mother or a lover ever could.

Love means God comes near to us in Jesus. We who are little and rebellious and unable to love Him back now have access to God through this Jesus. We are not alone anymore. Because of Him, we need not be destabilized by other lovers. All He asks is that we give everything to Him.

That seems like a lot. But it's the only way we can live happy lives. To know Him but to serve other gods is torture, hell before hell. Discovering the secret of surrender opens to us the music of the spheres, the peace that surpasses understanding, unbounded joy. We die to worldly distractions in order to rest in holy love, to enjoy the fruit of His suffering—the Creator's desire for intimate union with His human creation.

I want to rest in the arms of the One who fought for me. I want to know that sweetness in full. To do so, Oswald Chambers quotes St. Paul: 'I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me' (Gal. 2:20); "These words mean the breaking of my independence with my own hand and surrendering to the supremacy of the Lord Jesus... it means breaking the husk of my individual independence of God, and the emancipating of my personality with Himself, not for my own ideas, but for absolute loyalty to Jesus."

Lent then is an opportunity to let go of specific distractions so we can know Him more. It is simple: we give Him more space to love us; in gratitude, we love Him back. That rhythm sets in motion the ordering of our other loves, the people He calls us to love.

Immersed in His Spirit of love, we may hurt when we discover that we have loved others poorly, be it in needing another too much out of disordered desire or withholding love because one threatened us or did not give us what we wanted.

Our pain is good. Weep and rejoice in His mercy that renews our efforts to love others better. The Lord is faithful. He will not leave us alone in our human loves. He loves us and them too much! He converts us continuously with His self-giving until we love as He does. By the time we see Him face-to-face, we may well love others better than we do now.

DSM

*...God,
the blessed and
only Ruler, the
King of kings and
Lord of lords, who
alone is immortal
and who lives in
unapproachable
light, whom no one
has seen or can see.
To him be honor
and might forever.
Amen. 1 Timothy 6:15-16*

Why Pray?

WHY PRAY MORE? LET ME COUNT THE WAYS.

First, we are continually knifed by the jagged world and jagged worldly people who we love so much we hate them. Instead of dulling ourselves by any number of drugs, prayer invites us into the presence of God who always asks: 'Where is your heart?' Frankly, I often don't want to know. I want drugs! But more than drugs, I want peace, real peace that runs like a stream underneath my touchy self and wells up as I quiet my heart, feel the pain, and begin to allow living water to help me unload any number of conflicts I processed poorly in the hurried hours.

Second, prayer heals us. We pray more because the world isn't getting any better for us and we are not getting any better in facing its demands. The cure? More prayer, which is the way we unite with the One who loves us more than we love Him and who through Jesus surrounds and confirms us as beloved sons and daughters who need help. I pray because I need help. Always. I cannot say 'yes' to His will today without Him. I am His and I want His will to be mine. In prayer I re-up by fixing the eyes of my heart straight on Him who gave all to gain me.

Third, prayer softens our hearts. Only Jesus makes me cry. It's a good cry, born of gratitude for His self-giving, which frees me to release the everyday grief over the truth that I have little or no control over things in my life. My certainty is Him. I am being weaned off the world and secured in Him.

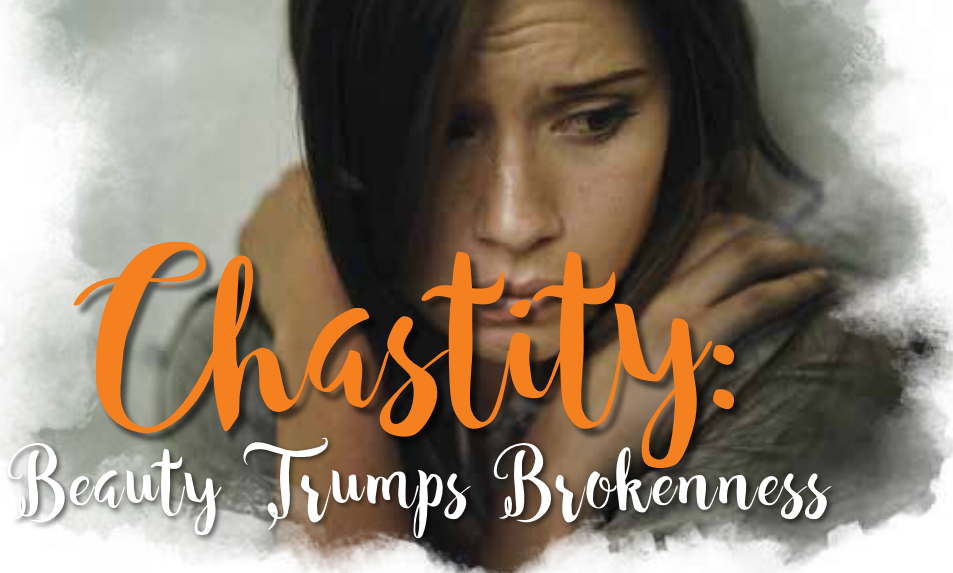
Fourth, prayer primes us to intercede for the hard-hearted. 'I weep because you don't', said St. Jean Vianney but we can do our part. We cry out to the Father on behalf of loved ones, certain that as the good Shepherd left good sheep behind to rescue us He will do the same for them (Luke 15:3-7). Remembering His generosity toward us inspires gratitude which fuels our eloquent petitions: 'Get him (or her) God!' We must persist like one who pounded on the judge's door til the old crank got up and acted rightly (Luke 18: 2-8).

*But if I say,
"I will not mention
his word or speak
anymore in his
name," his word is in
my heart like a fire, a
fire shut up in my
bones. I am weary of
holding it in; indeed,
I cannot. Jeremiah 20:9*

The logic is sure—if a divided man arose for her, how much more will Almighty God?

Fifth, prayer prepares us to answer our prayers or someone else's. As we welcome His generous love afresh and pray for that generosity to lance our beloved's heart, we are primed to make Jesus known however and to whomever He wills. I love being an answer to another's prayer! How can we not spill onto another if we have been before His altar where living waters are ever-rising (Ezek. 47)? Declare Him or burst (Jer. 20:9)!

Why pray more? Prayer changes everything. **DSM**



Chastity: Beauty Trumps Brokenness

A TOUGH WOMAN careful to avoid the gaze of others hears a man asking for her help. She turns toward Him. Jesus needs water, yes, but more than that He wants to give her what she needs—mercy that will well up from her depths and satisfy her forever. We discover her morally broken state later in John 4; all that matters now is that Love has come to her and that Love alone can make her whole.

Chastity is all about wholeness. Far from the pale and passive face we ascribe to it, chastity gives generously, purposefully. ‘The successful integration of sexuality within the person’ (CCC#2337) means that we can be liberated from lust and rigorous self-concern and free to offer ourselves to others for their good.

Jesus embodied that self-giving as a man—as God yes, but most definitely as a man. He is tender and strong. Jesus is appealing, and probably as puzzling to the Samaritan woman as He was desirable to her. No matter: Jesus was clear in love; clear in what was best for her.

In that way, Jesus the merciful is also Jesus the chaste. Chastity means His gendered, sexual self is united—in no conflict—with His worship of the One. Seamless integrity: the chaste Son’s need for ‘water’ in whatever form was sourced in the River of His Father’s love for Him. Committed to the Father’s will alone, His very human encounters with women and men alike resulted in greater wholeness in their lives, as we shall see throughout these six weeks.

We are not Jesus, nor are we exact replicas of the pre-fallen pair who celebrated their loss of loneliness in bold, shame-free sexual love (Gen. 2:18-25)! Today we live East of Eden, as inclined to shame

and fear and exaggerated desire as we are generous self-giving. No matter. Though God’s image in us may be broken, it is not destroyed. Something deeper in us longs to become potent in love and lovely in response to it. While we have breath, we represent Him on earth as either male or female, of which the Catechism sings: ‘Each of the two sexes is an image of the power and tenderness of God, with equal dignity though in a different way’... their union grants them a share ‘in the Creator’s generosity and fecundity.’ (CCC#2335)

Bearing His image means that we can know this truth—you are a good gender gift. Marriage is but one expression of such gift-giving. Your masculinity is potent, capable of engendering life in others; your womanhood is creative in its exquisite response to such life. Whether single or married, chastity is the virtue that frees us to grow into the gift we are and to learn to offer that gift.

Scary yes. The Samaritan woman may have averted Jesus’ gaze altogether had He not met her with such kindness. Similarly, He meets us with Almighty mercy, longing only to unite us with Himself. He is the source of ‘living water’ who seeks to well up in us. Might we leave old

‘wells’ behind and journey with Him toward chastity, the art of generous self-giving?

‘Father of mercy, You made me and now You seek to redeem me. You know me better than I know myself. I ask for the mercy to linger in Your presence and wait for You. I am confident that Your eyes of Love will reveal what is truest and best about my humanity. I marvel at how I am made to be like You. I welcome You as my Source, the Love I need to live and to give as a sexual, gendered being. Spring up, O Well.’ **DSM**

... but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life. John 4:14

Contending for the Bride

‘ZEAL FOR HIS HOUSE has Consumed Me.’ John 2:17

In order ‘to contend for the faith entrusted to all the saints’ (Jude 3), we must follow Jesus into the House of His Father and purge ourselves of what divides us. Yes, we must come into the light of fellowship and enlist the help of others, and yes, no-one can cast out our personal temple robbers but us. Our decision to refuse every altar but Christ Crucified is nothing short of a miracle of God’s mercy—His fiery kindness (mirrored in His members) persuading us that holy Presence beats the unstable presence of other lovers any day.

Then we are ready to give all for the saving of many lives—contending for the Gospel and its power to transform broken lives through the Church. We fight against every stronghold of thought that dulls and blurs the goal of purity and wholeness (aka chastity). We contend against the sick mercy of ‘gay Christianity’ and against the sick truth of pounding vulnerable ones with Scripture and Church teaching without lending a hand to help them overcome real conflicts. (Spoiler alert: this takes time, sometimes a lifetime...) Troubling too are evangelical churches so intent on reaching the LGBTQ+ community that they naively adopt non-biblical language and ethics and become converted by good ‘gay’ people.

We roll up our sleeves and fight for:

1. The lifting up of the One Cross in order to redeem the two natures—male and female. Under Christ, no

LGBTQ+ community can stand. We unite under one gracious hope—Christ Crucified—and one goal, the encounter between the blood and water, and our gendered selves. Only Almighty Mercy can dissolve the catastrophic impact of sin upon what it means to be male and female, created in His image. We must keep the message simple and clear—the Cross invites every person to enter that healing flood, and we in the Church must be constant in extending that invitation.

*... for zeal
for your house
consumes me, and
the insults of those
who insult you fall
on me. Psalm 69:9*

2. We preach the full range of sins against chastity, beginning with common ‘heterosexual’ ones we often wink at—misogyny, misandry, porn and romantic addictions, divorce, abuse, weird sexual legalism (everything but intercourse), etc. After that, it’s water off a duck’s back to preach repentance to the more obviously confused—‘Come into the water with us; we won’t throw stones but we will take your sins seriously, even as we have taken ours

seriously and are doing the hard work to get free.’

3. We provide real outlets where people can get free. I am troubled by communities which preach the truth beautifully but provide little if any in-depth pastoral care for sinners who need it. We must recognize the healing army that is there (and refer!) while adding to its ranks by getting free ourselves. Then, as our gift to the Church, we accompany real sinners who desire freedom: real repentance unto the real Jesus who shows us the Father and His all-surpassing power to restore what is broken.
4. Under the one Cross, we fight for the truth of every person’s gendered dignity, regardless of their confusing starting points. We summon it, we contend for it as part of what it means to be an ambassador of the Gospel. In the same way that we lovingly silence the Pharisee, so we refuse the false ethnos of the LGBTQ+ community. Under the one Cross, we recognize two natures—male and female—, and one goal, that estranged children of God encounter the Father and become beloved sons and daughters, empowered to resume the journey to wholeness. **DSM**

Letter to a Vulnerable Friend:

FIRST, THANK YOU for your commitment to your friend. Sometimes devout, energized persons like you can help prevent an already vulnerable soul from doing further injury. I realize your friend is on the verge of doing just that by pursuing gender reassignment surgery.

Gender is not a product of the mind; it is a fact of our birth. To be sure, your friend has a deep conflict with his or her true gender self, for which one must only be compassionate. Such compassion flows from the truth. Your friend has a gender self and to be at odds with that truth is a serious affliction. Your advocacy may help him or her to begin to resolve this identity confusion in the right way.

Your friend is not hearing the truth today, only pretty lies. To paraphrase Dr. Paul McHugh, the idea that gender is a matter of choice is without scientific foundation. Studies reveal that in spite of terrific costs to all family members, gender reassignment surgery does not result in happiness but the same or worse mental health conditions than existed before the surgery, including drug addictions, psychotic disorders and the risk of suicide.

Responding to the Transgendered'

Rather, living the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ. . . . 2 Cor 4:15

Your friend is vulnerable to robbers, and needs understanding and inspired care. This is a person who looks in the mirror and hates the reflection. He or she believes that self-acceptance lies in becoming the other gender. Wrong. I have worked with several persons whose 'fantasy gender selves' arose in response to profound distress. Their fantasy selves became the prison. It is a joyful labor of love to accompany the gender afflicted out of unreality and into their real selves.

Spiritual and emotional intervention makes sense. Why? We cannot change our genders. Guess what? Bruce Jenner is still a man! The only real choice we have is to make peace with the gender of our birth. Nevertheless, we must recognize that our gender identities (the psychological adjustment we make to our gender) are subject to profound frustration. We may feel chronically inadequate to master certain 'gender' tasks, or experience repulsion over

one's body type combined with a persistent desire to have different body traits.

The gender-afflicted need inspired therapy, not surgery. It is cruel to subject a vulnerable soul to knives and implants and alien hormones. We do not 'cure' an anorexic by excising fat from her body because she feels fat any more than we 'cure' a man who feels like a woman by cutting off his penis. We help him make peace with his intrinsic manhood, just as we help the anorexic adjust to a true body image.

Your friend is imprisoned by the lie that 'feelings' can and should determine biological gender. Wrong. God determines our gender and we must work that out in fear and trembling. Yes Jesus is the door that swings out from the prison and yes we must open it. Praise Him—we can do so in the light of Divine Mercy and merciful friends like you. **DSM**

Struck Down, Deployed



‘WE ARE STRUCK DOWN but not destroyed, always carrying around in the body the death of Jesus that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.’

(2 Cor. 4: 9b, 10)

I believe that the mightiest members of God’s healing army today are mothers and fathers whose children have ‘come out’ as LGBT+. Struck down by unintentional acts of domestic violence, these parents—facedown—discover Jesus for themselves.

Another’s wound and rebellion wakes them up. At last. The God of their childhood becomes Savior and Lord for them now. He gives them a share in His heart for the broken in need of His body. They will change the face of the Church.

I met Teri at an Encourage meeting. She was distraught and nearly hopeless about her daughter who claimed to be transitioning into a ‘son.’ At that point, her goal was to amass info about ‘transgender’ realities. She learned in the next few months that gaining knowledge was her way of controlling the chaos at hand.

When I saw her next at our ‘Open to Life’ seminar, she was remarkably composed. She told me that though

she is happy to learn more, she knows what God wants. ‘He wants me. This is more about my conversion than anything else. I am learning how to trust Him as never before.’

Teri followed up that seminar with a small Lenten prayer group we hosted about chastity, what it means to become whole in our gender and sexuality. Several persons attended with apparent gender identity problems. Teri’s divides are not apparent; she looks like the well-heeled and adjusted head of women’s ministry. Yet she was the first to lead out with confession about her issues as a woman and why those issues probably had made life harder for her daughter. What a woman. She goes to the Cross for her own brokenness first. She prays for her daughter out of the mercy she receives from Jesus.

Now I have the privilege of walking with Teri through a Living Waters group. I arrived at my parish early to set up one night and noticed a woman kneeling at the altar beneath the Cross. She was radiant, fragrant with holiness and looked a bit like Mary Mother of God as she united her heart with Jesus. I failed to realize it was Teri until later. No matter; even from a distance, I could discern that this intercessor was in sync with her Savior and destined to move mountains. A sword may have pierced her heart (Luke 2:35), but with that same sword, surrendered to Jesus, she will thwart the enemy’s schemes. Thank God for His marvelous plan! **DSM**

... so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.

Luke 2:35

The Nations Return

LAST YEAR, SOME LIVING WATERS FRIENDS from Thailand and China urged us at DSM/LW to gather international leaders again in Kansas City.

I balked and winced as I recalled the vision a dear friend had given me five years ago—it was nothing but a burnt field, still smoking. So was I. After 30 years of building Living Waters around the globe, I was asked by a council of Living Waters leaders to step off the team so that they could pursue other goals.

Overnight, friends with a shared language became strangers whose perspective I could no longer discern, let alone contend. The joy of gathering with the nations became a landmine, which had blown up in my face. A burnt field indeed.

In the years that followed, I spent time daily before the Crucified and died to what had been. I alternated between hope that leapt at God's lead and despair that slouched toward early retirement (bleech!). I wondered if seeds that die always release more life (John 12: 24-26).

God invited me into new friendships. Anne Paulk and Stephen Black asked me to join them in starting—Restored Hope Network—for persons impacted by SS; of equal blessing was Father Paul Check, the leader of Courage, who mentored this new Catholic and gave me a chance to share my witness in his world (which is becoming mine as well). I love these networks; I hope you do too, as they are beautiful expressions of God's heart for persons with SSA.

My primary call, however, is

Living Waters. To my surprise, some of the nations where we had released Living Waters re-initiated relationship with us. Provoked by conscience and now seasoned in ministry and decision-making, they wanted to return to the source. I was grateful yet tentative as I was and am still unwilling to return to the 'good old days.' They weren't that good and they are over.

So I wondered; might we build relationship based on mutual respect and a desire to grow together into a new season? I had tolerated 'cloak and dagger' stuff in the old system. No more. Either we trust each other or we choose other partnerships.

The DSM/LW staff agreed to host our international friends who wanted to come. Most of our friends did (which floored me) and honestly, it was heaven-on-earth. We started at the Restored Hope Conference in Chicago (amazing) then met at my home and at our offices for 3-days in which we dined, prayed, and centered on the Kingdom of God, embracing the whole Church, and identifying weaknesses in our married and single lives. No pressure, just the real Presence of God meeting us and helping us to love Jesus and each other more. Fragrant. God kissed us.

Poured out, the DSM/LW staff inhaled the truth that the nations had returned to us. But differently now, like adults with a shared bond. We like each other; we want to be together. Beautiful—new life springing forth from scorched, rich soil. **DSM**



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Based on the biblical foundations of compassion, integrity, and dependence on God, Desert Stream Ministries proclaims to the world the transforming power of Jesus Christ. We equip the body of Christ to minister healing to the sexually and relationally broken, through healing groups and leadership training for the local church.

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