

Sermon July 12 15 2007 The Good Samaritan Luke 10 25-37
“Let’s Be Real”

Today Jesus tells us a parable about how people become real. Through the course of our lives, beginning at rather young ages, most of us have been taught to program our life’s “default” on fear, rather than love. Where thinking comes first from a fearful place rather than first from a trusting place of love. We may have been born Real, that is, with our life’s “default” as love, but soon enough we’re taught otherwise and we become untrusting, frightened, fear-filled thinkers—literally, **un**-Real people.

Real, then, is what we seek to become—Real people, Real images of God. And we *do* seek this, or else we wouldn’t have phrases such as “Get Real” or “Let’s Be Real Here” or “Be Real, Would Ya?.” Real is something we seek to become, and it happens when something happens to us, when we’re given the opportunities to be Real.

In the example of the Good Samaritan story we’re taught that to get Real happens when we move our “default” from fear to love. It teaches us that true love for God expresses itself in caring for other’s needs—this is how we get Real.

Dr. Edgar Carlson, a former college president, once said, "We need each other to become ourselves." And we are our "best selves" - children of God - when the way we live with other people allows us to live out our heavenly love in earthly action. Neighbors in need enable us to be compassionate, kind, and just in our dealings with those in any sort of trouble, and to grow up and mature in the love of God. The poor and the needy, the hungry and the homeless, the helpless and the victims of oppression present us with an *opportunity* to live lives that are truly God-like toward others. This is what Jesus meant when he said “do this and you will live.”

Surely everyone in this room is aware of how rewarding it is to help someone who cannot help themselves. We know how much joy we have received when we have gone out of our way to help someone in need. Why then don t we live out our love for God and for our neighbor more regularly? Why don’t we do it?

IS IT NOT TRUE THAT THERE IS SOMETHING WITHIN US THAT
REBELS AGAINST DOING THE VERY THING THAT WOULD BRING

US THE MOST JOY? I know this is true for me! It's the Garden of Eden of story, isn't it? Even when we know the key to life we resist it.

Theologian, Tony Campolo tells about a young woman who decided to commit her life to Christ but still found life depressing and boring. She went to a psychotherapist for help, but after several sessions, felt that the effort was futile. Then one day she came into her therapist's office with her face radiant with excitement. "I've just had the most wonderful day," she said. "This morning I could not get my car started, so I called the pastor and asked him if he could drive me to my therapy appointment. He said he would, but on the way he had to stop by the hospital and make a few pastoral visits. So I went with him and while I was in the hospital I visited some elderly people in one of the wards. I read from the Bible and prayed with them. By the time the morning was over, I was higher than a kite. I haven't felt this good in years."

The psychotherapist quickly responded, "Now we know how to make you happy! Our problem is solved! Now we know how to keep you out of the doldrums!" Much to his surprise, the young woman answered, "You don't expect me to do this sort of thing every day, do you?"

She knew the solution to her problems. She knew how much satisfaction she received from ministering to others, but still she resisted. Her story is our story, is it not?

Last weekend 15 of us went to Milwaukee to feed the homeless. When we got there the Coordinator sincerely thanked us for being there because he said he knew there were other things we could be doing, even if it was just staying in bed. Oh the joy of staying in bed, of sleeping in...now granted, we didn't need to leave the church all that early—8:30/just like Sunday worship time—but it felt good to hear him say that. Perhaps sleeping in, or perhaps busy summer visiting schedules, or gardening responsibilities or fixing stuff around the house, or employment were the reasons more than ½ of our sign up sheet remained vacant a few days before we went. I'm grateful for Marsha, our Youth Director, calling in her troupes to fill the spots, especially given that some of the Youth just returned from their mission trip. What wonderful, wonderful examples of discipleship our Youth are for all of us.

I mentioned a bit last week, this ministry of feeding the homeless was one of the most meaningful and joyful experiences I've had. Maybe not everyone who went would agree...I'm thinking of Nancy Petzold whose job was in the kitchen refilling milk and water and keeping up with the dishwasher; at least I had the privilege of being amongst the tables interacting with the people, which obviously is what made it so meaningful and joyful for me. I don't know that Marsha would claim it to be one of the most joyful experiences for her either. We all agreed to place Marsha at the door where guests entered—not that there needed to be a traditional bouncer figure present, but it was clear there needed to be a disciplined and orderly fashion of entering. We knew Marsha to be perfect for the job.

And I doubt if Josh Mogensen or Alex Koeser would tell you it was their most joyful discipleship experience, as they volunteered for the garbage corner. Now, you might get a heart filled, joyful response from Amanda Rabe and Tammie Gierke who were the first two to provide food with big smiles and warm greetings, followed by a line of youth girls: Chrystal, Gina, Kayla, Kelly, Angela, and Ally (Ally, who of course will be the only disciple you'll ever see feeding the homeless with pearls on). Jenna, I know would tell you it was meaningful she was blessed to work with me.

Where I do trust that everyone *was* on the same page was how we probably all would agree, had we not gone we would have all just hung out Saturday morning/early afternoon a little **less** committed to something (hang out with our friends??/feed 230 homeless people??); a little **less** feeling as if something we were doing really mattered (work in the garden...puttzing in the garage or feed 230 homeless people??). In other words, we think it wouldn't have mattered *to us* had we not gone, but **because we did go**, it *really did* matter—and not just to the guests, but to us...to our spiritual well-being; it mattered to our recovery and our remembrance of our Real selves.

It didn't matter to the Levite that he passed by the man on the side of the road. Had he stopped it would have mattered to him (and the man), but because he didn't stop and experience it, he couldn't know what it may have meant for himself, and the man. He literally refused the very thing that could have brought him joy. So, we assume he might have first and foremost figured in the inconveniences involved (and we all do this). Given that Levite's were of the upper-middle class, always with the best education money could buy, it certainly was not their stature to get involved with people beneath their status or proper family. Since the man aside the road

had no clothes or speech, who could tell what rank he came from? He couldn't take a chance on being seen on the Jericho road associating with just anybody. The rumors would ruin him. Now *we* might not take these exact issues into our consideration when choosing to serve someone or not, but we do have our own list of how it might inconvenience us—we just do.

Then a priest came by, but wouldn't get near him. In those days one had to handle a dead body in a special way; otherwise you were defiled. A life was hanging in the balance, but the priest was worried about staying pure and not getting defiled by an improper involvement.

Then a Samaritan came by. In Jesus day the Jews and Samaritans hated each other (much like, for example, the Israelis and Palestinians in our day). Jesus said, "The Samaritan was filled with compassion." He was not concerned with the man's pedigree, his race, or the cause of his tragedy. He simply had compassion. The word compassion means the ability to feel the feelings of another at a level lower than one's head...the womb, the gut, and then, to act accordingly. A closed heart does not feel this; although one can still be charitable, a closed heart does not feel the suffering of others.

So in this story, when the despised Samaritan proved to be the good neighbor to the wounded man, Jesus was illustrating to us that concern for others has no boundaries. When God has brought each of us to healing from our judgment, harsh opinions, prejudice, and overall distorted thinking (which I like to call moral and spiritual disorder, otherwise known as sin), we are then living in a place of recovering the Real self which God created (in God's image) that resides within us.

When we come from this place of love, which is defined as "deliberate action to extend ourselves for the purpose of nurturing our own and others spiritual growth and healing," we become an effective instrument in reaching others who have similar needs; the need to be loved **and** the need **to love**—we literally *need* to love others. When we exchange this "love action"—the love of God through us—we are living out of a responsibility we have received from God.

It all goes back to the great commandment read in verse 27 of today's scripture: "you must love the lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind, and, love your neighbor as yourself." As we truly love God and our neighbor, our hearts lead the way,

not our judgment or fearful “default” thinking. Jesus teaches us over and over again that the old laws, the commandments, are not to be followed as rituals in our minds per se, but are to be lived within our hearts, b/c *if you do love God and your neighbor you automatically **are** living out the 10 commandments!* It’s heaven on earth.

So, when we talk about hope for the world, what we’re really hoping for is Real human compassion to be world-wide. As Rev Mercer spoke about last week, we can be successful (more so than ever before) but that may have nothing to do with our faithfulness to God as human beings. What we want to be successful at is our faithfulness to God in becoming more and more Real people, using Christ mindedness to get there. That is, not necessarily “What would Jesus **do**?” but “What would Jesus **think**?”—we know what Jesus would do, what we need to practice is how he gets there. He’s the Christ because he uses the Christ mindedness. Christ is not Jesus’ last name, it’s God’s divine mind, which Jesus fully said Yes to, and we can too.

In close:

The world relies on compassionate people to train us as to the values of life...we learn our values from the opportunities to be compassionate. As a matter of fact, the only thing of value in our world is whatever part of it we look upon with love. All we need to ask as Christians is: “How can I love this?”

The great preacher Rev. Dr. W.E. Sangster was once asked what impressed him the most on his extensive world travels. Dr. Sangster replied that the greatest impression was that he had not seen one single Atheist’s Home for Orphan children, or any example of an Agnostic Hospital for the Poor and Needy. Yet, in countless countries and unexpected places, he encountered Christians reaching out with comfort and encouragement through health and feeding programs.

Why *have* Christians been historically so compassionate, so charitable, so caring? It is because once **we** were lying beside the road broken and bleeding, and nail-scarred hands reached down to us and ministered to us in our need. Now we pay it forward as people who are faithful to getting Real! Besides, we have found that such a concern for others *is* the source of unlimited joy. Our Master himself put it like this: "Do this and live!"

Let us pray:

Compassionate God, we pray that the lives we lead may be worthy of you and fully pleasing to you, as we seek to bear fruit in line with our calling as your followers. We recognize the need for us to Be Real, to be visible in and through the way we reach out to our neighbor. Forgive us if we seek to justify any lack of action on our part by asking the question “Who is my neighbor?”

Forgive us when we make our responsibility as your followers a lower priority ...when our comfortable lifestyles interfere with our social love in action.

Forgive us when we gladly profess that our love for God, is with all our heart, all our soul, all our strength and all our mind; while stumbling over the call to love our neighbor as we love our selves.

Forgive us when we ignore the cries of the poor, and are indifferent to those who have needs. Help us to identify with those who are oppressed and to recognize and help bear the burdens of those who suffer in any way, especially for those in our church’s prayer corner, and for the families who have lost loved ones these past few weeks.

Jesus, Savior and Lord, open our hearts to love as you loved, to think as you thought, and to care as you cared.

Strengthen us to *include* in our lives, our prayers, and our fellowship, those who feel excluded because of their race, their sexuality, their age, or their disability, just as you did throughout the gospels.

Help us to accept people as you accept them, as people made in the image of God, and precious to God.

Help us to reach out to people as you reached out to them, as people with hurts to be healed; as neighbors - of yours - and of ours. This we pray along with the prayer Jesus taught us: Our Father...

BENEDICTION

Go into the world

strengthened by the glorious power of God,
enfolded in the love and mercy of Jesus Christ,
filled with the wisdom and understanding of the Holy Spirit.

(sermon illustrations from sermons.com under lectionary text)