

SHARING THE DIVINE PRESENCE

Luke 10:1 – 11, 16 – 20

Galatians 6:1 – 16

Sunday, July 7, 2013

This past week, I came across a video on the Internet of a preacher in Oklahoma, and I don't know, maybe some of you saw it because it went viral, it was *everywhere*, it ended up on CNN. Basically what happened was, at some point during his sermon, someone in the congregation started falling asleep, or his head nodded or something. The preacher *noticed* it and just *went off*. He started saying, "Son, don't you go to sleep while I'm talking. Hey, hey, hey, hey. Don't you lay your head back. I'm *important*. I'm *somebody*." (He actually said that.)

At this point, he left the pulpit, walked out into the congregation, right up to this young man (high school age), and started dressing him down. And then in the midst of humiliating this teenager in front of the whole church, he says, "Now, I love you. You *know* I love you. Have I convinced you that I love you? You *better* nod your head yes."

It would have been bad enough if he had stopped there, but he didn't. He notices someone *else* sitting a few rows back and says, "And where have *you* been? I noticed on the calendar I'm supposed to *marry* you all. What makes you think I'd marry you? You're one of the sorriest church members I have! You're not worth fifteen cents." He looks at the fiancée and says, "And *you* want to marry *him*?"

Then he stops and says, "Now, let me just tell everybody here how much I love these kids. Do you know I love you, sir?" He *makes* the guy stand up and hug him while he keeps saying, "You know I love you." And then he looks the guy in the eye and says, "I'm the real deal."

He doesn't stop there. He calls out another guy and starts talking about his *wife*. He points out a *mother* and starts yelling about how her children are going to turn on her. He starts yelling at the teenager working in the video room about his bad attitude (which it's no wonder why this ended up on the Internet, then). And he says to him, "If you *loved* me, and you *submitted* to me, you'd know what my *heart* is and how much I *love* you." He goes on like that for about five minutes.

Now, we're *shocked* when we *see* and *hear* stuff like that, and we kind of laugh it off and dismiss him as someone who's maybe had a *breakdown* or is just on the *extreme* side of the spectrum. But I think we actually see this a lot among Christians. People who are saying, "I love you," or, "Jesus loves you," but they're going about it in a way that is anything *but* loving. Like, just because we say, "I love you," means we can then tell someone what we *really* think about them, and everything will be *fine*. Or we can say, "You know I *love* this person, but..."

We see Christians all the time who are using the Bible and faith and *Jesus* and *their own love* as a *weapon*. Christians who are trying to share Jesus with everybody, and they *talk* about Jesus, but the one thing they aren't actually doing is *sharing Jesus*. A lot of times we end up *forcing* Jesus. Jesus says, "I send you out like lambs into the midst of wolves," but a lot of times Christians end up going out like *wolves* into the midst of *lambs*.

I think a great question to ask when you're reading the Bible is, "What is the question that Jesus is trying to answer here?" Jesus is *doing* something, but why is he doing it? What question is he trying to answer? I think when we look at these scripture readings today, one of the questions that Jesus is answering (and Paul follows up on it) is, "How do you share my presence with others?"

In the reading from Luke, Jesus is literally sending out his disciples and giving them instructions about how they are to *do* this. And there are just a couple of bullet points I'll hit on this, and then we'll focus on one thing in particular. Jesus says, "I send you out like lambs into the midst of wolves." What are *lambs* like; how are they typically characterized? They're *gentle*. Jesus says, "I'm sending you out to be *gentle* in a world that is *ravenous*."

What does Paul say in *his* letter? If someone has sinned, restore them in a spirit of *gentleness*. We are called to be *gentle* with our faith and our words and our actions. Not to *force* God on others, but to open ourselves up so that God can work *through us*.

Jesus says, "Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals," and then talks about where they are to *stay* and what they are to *eat*. Why? Trust that God is going to provide for you. That when you find yourself in this situation of sharing God's presence with someone, and you really don't know what to do, *trust* that God is going to provide you with everything you need to *do* that (patience, gentleness, wisdom).

He says, "Don't rejoice in what *you* are able to do; in *your* successes. Rejoice that your names are written in heaven." That God *knows* you and is *with* you. Paul follows this up by saying, "May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." Like that preacher who kept saying, "I'm *important*. I'm *somebody*. I'm the *real deal*." No, what they're *saying* is, "Don't rejoice in what *you* have done. Find *joy*, find *strength* and *hope* in what *God* has done. Because when you are *in Christ*, you recognize that you don't do *anything* on your *own*. It's all God working *through* you."

So how do we begin sharing the divine presence with others? Be *gentle*. Trust that God will be with you and provide you with exactly what you need to *do* this. And don't make it about *you*. Make it about *God*. You know, my story is never about *me*. It's about God working *through* me; *through* you. Let your life point to God. Let your life shine a great big spotlight on God. So that when people look at you, they see something about God.

But here's the part I really want to focus on. Both Jesus and Paul talk in terms of *harvesting*. Jesus refers to his disciples as laborers going out to gather the harvest. Paul says you *reap* what you *sow*. Whatever you *plant* and *put out there*, that's what's going to come back to you. He says if you sow *corruption*, if that's what you put out there, then that's what's going to come back to you. If you plant the *Spirit*, you're going to *reap* the Spirit.

Jesus talks about it *this* way. He tells his disciples, "Whenever you go into a house, first say, 'Peace to this house!'" Put *peace* out there. Sow *peace*, and you will *reap* peace. If for whatever reason they *don't* share in your peace, what do you do *then*? How do you *treat* them? *The same way you treat the ones that do.*

Jesus says that if someone shares in your peace, say to them, "The Kingdom of God has come *near* to you." If they *don't* share in your peace, then shake the dust off your feet (*let it go*) and say to them, "The Kingdom of God has come near to you." Our job, Jesus is saying, is to *share his peace*, to share the *good news* of the Kingdom of God, to let *that* be what we plant in the world.

You can't control what *other* people do and how *other* people respond. All you can control is what *you* do and how *you* respond. So let it be in a way that shares *peace* and *gentleness* and *good news* and *joy* and *love*.

I was reading a while back about this psychological phenomenon called *trait transference*. What happens is, people unconsciously associate what you say about the qualities of *other people* with the qualities of *you yourself*. So if I'm talking to you and I say, "Oh, you know Bill. He's so arrogant and judgmental," you will unconsciously associate *me* with arrogance and judgment. If I say, "Bill is such a kind, generous, loving person," you're going to unconsciously associate *me* with kindness, generosity, and love.

You *reap* what you *sow*. Peace begets peace. Love begets love. Positive energy begets positive energy. In the same way, judgment begets judgment. Anger begets anger. Impatience begets impatience. Criticism begets criticism.

Jesus said it another way elsewhere: "With the judgment you *make*, you will be *judged*." Or like The Beatles said, "The love you *take* is equal to the love you *make*."

There's a sign hanging in the church office by Rody's desk. I see it every day when I come in. It says, "You *are* your *words*." What you put out there is what you will get back. All this to say, we have to be really careful how we talk about others, how we talk *to* others; how we talk about God. Everything we *do*, everything we *say* shows the world something, not just about *us*, but about the *God* we serve. Words matter. And if you use words that give grace, grace will be given to you.

So all of this together, what does this tell us about sharing the divine presence with others? A few weeks ago, I changed my cell phone number from a Nebraska number to a *local* number. And when I did, I started getting some strange text messages. Because apparently, the number that I got used to belong to a drug dealer. So I started getting all these text messages and phone calls from people who were looking to buy drugs.

I started thinking, “How do I respond to this?” And the first guy who messaged me, my response was kind of snarky. I said, “I just got this number. I’m a pastor. So, no, I can’t sell you two g’s. Looks like you need to find a new dealer.” And the more I thought about it, I thought, “I don’t *want* him to find a new dealer. Not only that, but I just cast a lot of judgment out on him. How does that affect his view of pastors and Christians and even *God*?”

So it happened again with a completely different guy, and I started talking to him. And I said, “I just moved to town and got this number, so take this as your sign that you don’t *need* it. You’re *better* than that.” He comes back after a while and says, “I’m really sorry.” And I say, “Look, I’m not looking to get you in trouble or anything. I’ll delete your number when we’re done talking. It’s just that I’m a pastor, and I’ve had to do funerals before for people who have overdosed, and it’s really *awful*, and I don’t want to see that happen to *you* or to your *family*. I don’t know you, but I feel like I got this number and you’re texting *me* for a reason. Just please be careful.”

We talked a little more before we finished up. And I don’t know if he took me seriously or if he was just over there humoring me or *laughing* at me. I can’t control how *he* responded. All I can control is how *I* respond, and I feel like I was able to respond with gentleness, peace, and love, no judgment, in a way that shared something about God with him.

If someone comes to our church or comes to *you* seeking help, we don't always know if that need is legitimate, or if they're just someone who knows how to work the system. We can't control what *they* do. All we can control is what *we* do. And what *we* are called to do is share Christ's presence with everyone, share Christ's gentleness, peace, and love with everyone, and *trust* that God is going to work *through* us and work *in* them and *do something* with that.

So in your life, what are you *sowing* right now? And what do you *want* to sow? Because that's what you're going to get back. As a *church*, what are we sowing right now? And what do we *want* to sow? Because that's what *we* are going to get back.

Living in ways that share the divine presence is incredibly simple; speaking and acting in ways that are gentle and trusting and loving. Very simple. And it is the hardest thing you will ever strive to do, and it will take you your whole life to figure out. And you may not ever get it right. You might keep falling short again and again.

But the good news is, it's not about how close *we* come to God's Kingdom; like, "I've *almost got it!*" Because, like Jesus says, "The Kingdom of God has come *near to you.*" All *we've* got to do is point it out to others. "That's what it's like. That's what *God* is like." In doing so we share *with them* in the presence of the divine, even if we don't have it all figured out yet.