

Relationships for Everyday Life: Self-less-ness

Introduction

Our reading this morning comes from the gospel of John. As we come to our text this morning let me remind us of where we have been over these last few weeks. We have been looking at relationships – haven't we?

We have been reminded that we have been created in a way – that being in relationship with others and more importantly with our God – is important. The relationships that we have been created for are much more than the casual – 'how you doing' 'how's it going' kind of relationships. Instead we are called to significant relationships. Relationships that move us deep in the heart of the other, our Triune God and those around us.

We have talked about relationships – I have tried to help us to look to God – to God's relationship with Israel, with the church, and with others throughout scripture in order that we might grow in our relationships.

We have looked at how to move from casual relationships to significant relationships we have to be able to 'trust', to 'persevere', to 'expand our circle beyond the safety of those we know – those that are like us – and those that like us.'

In our gospel reading this morning – we see Jesus – eating with his disciples – the cross and death itself fill the room with unpleasant expectation. Yet even now Jesus is showing his disciples and us something about relationships – and about self-less-ness.

Prayer
Scripture Reading

What are we looking for in our relationships? What do we hope to get out of our relationships with others – with our God?

I mean just between you and me here this morning as friends – being honest with one another...

I did a wedding this spring. The vows that the couple had chosen were beautiful and there was this line in there that went:

“I expect nothing in this world except that my love for you will grow stronger and deeper, rather than decreasing, as the years wear upon us.”

As I sat with the couple to discuss their vows – talking about what this meant – so they would be clear about the promises that they were making – I said to them something along the lines of:

“I expect nothing in this world ... I expect nothing in response to my love for you – not that you will wash my clothes, or pay the bills, or raise my kids, or trudge off to work every day. I expect nothing in response to my love for you – not even that you will love me back ... only that I would love you more.”

What is it we are looking for in our relationships? What do we expect?

To be loved?

To be cared about or even for?

To have others affirm us, encourage us – what we do and what we think?

(What do they say? – ‘Birds of a feather flock together.’)

To benefit in position, prestige, power, influence, property?

(It is all about who you know and what you do – right?)

What are we looking for in our relationships?

I spent last week with the staff at Zionsville Presbyterian Church in Zionsville, Indiana. ZPC is 28 years old and worships about 750 people each Sunday. Did I say that they are 28 years old – that they started out from 0 and now are worshipping about 750 people on a Sunday morning.

I met on Monday with the Senior Pastor Glenn McDonald. Glenn was here last fall, leading a conference on Discipleship. As we finished our time together Glenn took me to a back room book shelf that was filled with books where he gave me his book “Living Beyond the Sanctuary: Discipleship in the Real World.”

In this book he asks the question – ‘What are we looking for in our relationships?’ – about our relationship with God. He suggests that we are possibly looking for some kind of blessing – some kind of well being – some kind of material and spiritual security.

“Surely – If I come to worship, read my Bible, pray, do good things for others – then....

(You fill in the blank.)”

But it seems to me – as I look at God’s relationship with Israel, with the Church, and with those we see throughout the pages of scripture – that God shows us something very different about relationships. Relationships are not so much about what I can get – but what I can give – they are about self-less-ness.

And that is what we **see in today’s scripture is Jesus self-less-ly giving himself** to his disciples.

John has told us that Jesus is about to *‘depart from this world and go to the Father.’* In other words he is **about to die** – and not just die – die on a cross. Jesus’ dying is no accident – he knows good and well what is about to happen – and he has told his disciples much the same.

Being with people when someone is dying can be very revealing – relationships are often stressed to the max – and people are no longer able to hide the reality of who they are and how they have been in relationship with the others in that room.

Sometimes this is not pretty picture. Old hurts and wounds come out. Anger surfaces. People are jockeying for position and property. (You said I could have this ... right?)

Sometimes this is beautiful thing. Family and friends gathered sharing stories, gently caring for their loved one, reminding that loved one that they are indeed loved, remembering all the gifts that they have received by being in relationship with that person. And in a very self-less act even giving permission to that loved one to die – letting them know we will be ok.

Jesus is about to die – but even now – Jesus is showing his disciples and us something about being in relationship with others.

John tells us that Jesus – who is about to die - is at a table eating supper with his disciples – when he gets up from the table – takes off his outer garment – wraps a towel around himself – pours water into a basin – and then begins to wash his disciples' feet.

Now just in case we have forgotten – this is Jesus:

the Word that was with God at the beginning – the creator of all things – the Word that became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

This is Jesus –

the light that shines in the darkness – the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world – the Messiah.

This is Jesus –

the living water, the bread of life, the light of the world, the gate, the Good Shepherd who will lay down his life for his sheep, the resurrection and the life, the true vine, the way, the truth and the life.

This is Jesus –

the Son of God – Lord of all – Rabbi – Teacher.

He is washing the dirt and grime from his disciples' feet – he is performing an act of both hospitality – and – servant-hood. Jesus receives nothing personally from this act – he will not convince Judas not to betray him – he will not keep Peter denying him – he will not keep these disciples from fleeing – scattering in fear after his arrest – because he washed their feet. He will show them, however, that being in relationship with others is about being self-less – about doing things not because we benefit in some way – but because others benefit in some way.

Jesus is going to the cross – to die – not so that he can benefit from being in the glory of the 'Father' but so that we can benefit from being in the glory of the 'Father'. Paul says it like this *“Rarely will anyone die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.”* (Romans 5:7-8)

So – if I am following this right – what Jesus got out of his relationship with the disciples and with us as disciples – was 'the cross' – and what we got was – well – 'everything'.

One of the things that was very impressive to me at Zionsville Presbyterian Church was their focus on mission – on being generous. It is evident everywhere you look – that they exist not for their own sake – but for the sake of others.

They are committed to being disciples (followers of Jesus) not for the sake of themselves but so that they can make disciples of all nations.

Their mission budget – giving to others - constituted 23% of their total budget. That is a pretty self-less thing don't you think?

What does it look like for us to be self-less in our relationship.

When you parked this morning – did you think about the others who were not here yet in choosing your spot?

When you pick up after your kids – (your husband – spouse) did you grumble under your breath.

When you grumble about what your parents ask you to do.

Does self-less-ness look more like

Listening instead of speaking?

Being with others – fully present – instead of being busy doing?

Understanding instead of persuading?

Giving of our time instead of our hurriedness?

What does it look like for us to be self-less in our relationship with our God?

Let me ask you this. What is worship all about for you this morning? Is it about the convenience of time, place, style? Would you be here if this service was at 8 or at 12 or at 9:30?

Are you wondering what you can get out of this morning's service?

Are you hoping to get a little spiritual 'pick me up'?

I thought worship was all about our serving God and not ourselves?

Conclusion

I want you to take a few moments on your Connection Card this morning – to commit yourself to one act of growing in your relationship with God and one act of growing in your relationship with others.