

Sermon: August 28, 2011

**"The high road"**

Talk about basic religion 101 ... this is the 2<sup>nd</sup> lesson for today. Basic humanity and goodness ... just the way Jesus wants us to live!! Listen to some of these pearls ...

*"Let love be genuine ... hate what is evil ... hold fast to what is good ... rejoice in hope ... be patient in suffering ... persevere in prayer ... contribute to the needs of the saints (how about our love bucket???) ... extend hospitality to strangers (one of the things we try to do all the time) ..."*

But then the words get a little "tougher" ...

"Bless those who persecute you ..." (not so sure I can do this ...)

Somebody sticks it to you ... and we are supposed to bless him????

"Do not repay evil with evil ..." This makes sense. There is no sense playing the same game as our enemy.

How about the "high road" ... the "spiritual road"?????

"As much as you can ... live peaceably with all. Do not avenge yourself ... leave that to God."

Now ... I don't know much about "the judgment." But ----- there will be a day ... and we will stand before God ... in the raw nakedness of our humanity ... and we'll have to own up to who and what we are.

There's no point returning evil for evil.

Now ... how about this???

"If your enemy is hungry .... feed him. If he's thirsty ... give him something to drink."

You see ----- when you engage someone who is just plain nasty ... well, this is what they want. But when you don't ... when you take the high road of decency ... well, it's like "heaping hot coals upon their head." (Nice imagery on the day of our church picnic!@!!)

We all know what it's like to have someone stick it to us. In the workplace ... a nasty divorce ... fighting over your kids ... a division in the church ... a friendship gone amuck ...

When someone oozes hatred ... it's like they want you to do the same in return. Why? ----- because then they have you exactly where they want you. THEY GOTCHA!! They've engaged you ... they have the power.

But ... when you heap those coals up on their heads ... when you take "the high road" ... when you choose to be a person of peace ----- they don't like it. They've lost their power.

**BEING PEACEFUL IS NOT WHIMPY!!**

It takes a lot of guts to be a person of peace ----- strength, humility, inner spirit ... these are the ingredients in standing up for what is good.

Now ... in life ... this doesn't always work the way we'd like. So ----- what do you do when your tank is empty?

What do we do when, in our head, we know what is right ... we know what we need to do ...

but we just can't do it??

Maybe you withdraw ... turn into yourself. You begin to shut others out.

You pretend on the outside, but you are dying on the inside. You are depressed ... and you don't know where to go or what to do.

It matters not how "strong" you are ... how successful you are ... how much you have or don't have ... we all have moments when we want to give up, shut the world out, and "cash it in."

It's ok.

Jesus got "depressed" once-in-a-while. "My God, my God --- why have you forsaken me" ... he said.

Jesus couldn't understand why his "own people" didn't understand him ... and even tried to get rid of him ... but the "Samaritans and sinners" .... those on the outside-looking-in ----- they seemed to hear and feel what Jesus stood for. This is why I often say, tongue-in-cheek ----- I get along much better with sinners and non-religious people than I do with those who wear their religion on their sleeve.

The bottom line is ----- you gotta allow yourself to be human!!

Are you depressed? ... don't pretend you are not.

Worried? ---- don't keep it to yourself.

Feel fragile? ... it's ok.

The beginning of healing is the acceptance of our own humanity. This is what Jesus did. His healing wasn't a magic act. He cared enough ... to reach deep into the humanity of the everyday person ... because this is where healing begins.

I enjoy sports. What I really enjoy is the human side of competition.

Most of us south-siders have heard of the White Sox. They signed a player this year ... who has been one of the best sluggers in baseball over the past 8 years. This year has been the very worst of his career .... in fact, his year has been the worst of almost anyone's career. His name --- Adam Dunn.

He was paid a huge amount of money to come here. Some of the articles about his performance have been down-right nasty. In fact ... a well-known columnist in our local paper just ripped him this week.

A young man comes into my office the other day. He and his wife have 4 kids in our Sunday School ... and he comes by to register them. He starts talking to me about Adam Dunn. They are buddies. He and his wife, Adam and his wife ---- they hang-out, and care about each other. He talks about Adam Dunn's big heart. He shares what Adam is going through ----- his struggle, how it affects his wife and kids ... the beginnings of depression. He makes \$15 million a year (almost in my category!@!!) ... but ----- he's still human ... he has dignity and a soul ... he can still be fragile. No amount of money can buy all that back!! It's too easy to look just at the surface ... and forget that "what's inside" is what makes us who we are.

I'm in Palos Heights yesterday. A small older home. A place where a guy my age and his long-time companion have lived for many years. The garage door is open ... lots of tables and chairs scattered in the driveway and front yard ----- people eating and visiting. When I arrive ... two of his buddies bring out a card-table ... and on it they place the ashes of their friend. They tell me he seemed happy on the outside ... but there was an emptiness inside. Somehow, somehow ----- this led him to take his own life. I'm not sure how they found me or our church ... but they did ... and I guess that's good.

We begin the service. I talk about hope ... about never being afraid to ask for help. I talk about our shared humanity ----- it's the greatest of all gifts ... and yet it can be so fragile.

I share Jesus' words: "Come to me, you who are weary and heavy laden ... and I will give you rest. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Yes, the world can be a heavy place. But ----- when we know God's presence ... and trust each other ... our journey can always be one of hope.

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