

June 28, 2009

We are people of faith, not of fear
2 Corinthian 8:7-15, Mark 5:21-43

There is a humorous story about a young woman who wrote a love letter to her former fiancé:

Dear Tommy,

Can you ever forgive me? No words could ever express the great unhappiness I've felt since breaking our engagement. Please say you'll take me back. No one could ever take your place in my heart, so please forgive me. I love you! I love you! I love you!

Yours forever,

Marie

P.S. And congratulations on winning the state lottery!

On any occasion, an egocentric story such as this makes for a funny tale in life. We are people of faith, not of egocentric faith, but of God-centric faith.

In the "Westminster Catechism 1," it asks, "What is the purpose of your life?" The answer is, "To glorify God and enjoy Him forever." What is your purpose of life? Honestly speaking, we may confess, "To be glorified in myself and be happy by achieving honor, success, and being recognized by others." This is a common egocentric thought.

Then how can you please God? I challenge all of us here today to discover our answer to this question during the sermon this morning.

We meet problems every day. We are struggling with problems. Some are troubled with problems so that these become stumbling stones; on the other hand, others become challenged by problems, so that they make these stepping stones for elevating life.

Eileen Egan worked with Mother Teresa for more than thirty years. Describing a vision of the street, she describes Mother Teresa's amazing approach to life. She tells about the day she was talking to Mother Teresa about all the problems that faced them, rattling off a depressing list of difficulties.

Then Mother Teresa, with a warm smile, said, "Do we have to call everything a problem? Why not erase the word problem from our vocabulary and instead use the word gift?" Eileen Egan said, "From that time on, items that presented disappointments or difficulties would be introduced with 'We have a small gift here' or 'Today we have an especially big gift.'" Mother Teresa had seen God working through the problems, so she called problems "gifts."

Now there were smiles when confronted with situations that earlier had been described by the dour word, "problem." In a wonderful way, Mother Teresa captured the spirit of our Lord, the spirit of seeing problems as opportunities.

After reading this story, I found out that the difference between ordinary people and extraordinary people is the difference in their attitude toward their problems.

One Korean couple started a dry cleaning business. They worked very hard day and night together. So, the business began picking up. But, there were problems in operating their shop because of their different opinions. One day the couple argued over a matter regarding hangers. The husband hung the clothes with the hanger hanging inside out, while his wife hung clothes with the hanger hanging outside in. The couple didn't bend in their insistence and finally compromised that one would do it one way and the other the other way. So, the clothes were hung with hangers hanging in different directions. It didn't really matter what direction the clothes hung. But, it was matter between them.

One night a robber came, driving a big truck up to the front of the dry cleaning shop, broke the door, got inside and grasped the clothes in his arm. He tried to take the clothes hung in hangers quickly. But, this was a problem because the clothes hangers were hung from both directions. Finally, the robber gave up trying to steal the clothes because it was not easy to take the clothes off the rods very quickly before the alarm would go off. It turned out that it was good for this couple to hang the clothes from both sides. Don't worry about different opinions among us. God makes our differences good.

Today's scripture reading introduces the story of healing two people: a twelve year old girl and a woman who had been sick for twelve years. Jesus was on his way to see a little girl who was critically ill, when suddenly he was interrupted. As he was moving through the streets, people began to press in around him. The New English Bible puts it dramatically: "He could hardly breathe for the crowds."(Mark 5:24)

The people were so excited to be near him that they were pushing and shoving and crowding in close to him.

In the crowd that day was this woman who had been hemorrhaging for twelve years. She wasn't even supposed to be in that crowd, but she was desperate. She slipped up behind Jesus, working her way through the crowd, and when no one was looking, she reached out, tentatively, fearfully, and touched the hem of his robe. Right then, the story tell us, her bleeding stopped. She thought she had gone unnoticed, so she dropped back and tried to lose herself in the huge crowd.

But then Jesus stopped, turned around, and said, "Who touched me?" The disciples were astonished by that question. Who touched you? What do you mean who touched you? Everybody's touching you. In this crowd, everybody's touching you. What kind of question is that? But Jesus knew that the disciples sometimes didn't know a push from a touch. And, Jesus knew that it was a special touch.

He began to look around. The woman had not expected to be found out. Timidly, she stepped forward and told Jesus everything about her condition –how she had been

bleeding for so many years and had tried everything, but nothing had helped. In fact, she had only gotten worse. She told Jesus that she had heard about him and his power to heal, and that she believed that if she could just touch his clothing, she could be made well; and it had worked! The bleeding had stopped. Jesus' heart went out to her, and he spoke to her tenderly: "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

Our fear is everywhere in life. We are in fear of death, of getting sick, of guilt and condemnation, of criticism, of rejection and of failure. Because of these fears we are stressful and depressed. But, the Bible says that we are not people of fear but of faith. There are many comforting messages. The Lord said, "Don't be afraid, I'm with you!" Mostly, we are afraid of unseen elements that are unreal rather than object we are seeing.

After reading this story we may have wondered why Jesus didn't hurry to see the twelve year old girl. Jesus seemed not quite right in terms of priority of work. He wasted his time to meet unnecessary this woman and failed to see the girl.

Have you ever wondered why Jesus called attention to the hemorrhaging woman? Why didn't he just let her slip away? Because, by bringing her forward and announcing to the huge crowd that she was healed, he was saying to the people, "Look now! She's well! She's whole! She has been healed. God is not angry with her, so stop battering her. Let her reclaim her place in the community. Widen the circle and let her in."

I want to let you know that even though other people may see us as not-important persons, Jesus doesn't see us as others see us. Jesus sees us as a whole person who needs whole healing. The woman in the scripture was a battered person, terribly in need of compassion. She had not been physically abused, as far as we know; but without question, she had been battered socially, emotionally, and spiritually by the society in which she lived.

They shunned her emotionally, they cast her out socially. They labeled her as "unclean" spiritually. They told her that she was dirty and that everything and every person she touched she contaminated. They told her that God was angry with her and had set this misfortune on her because, in their minds, she had done some terrible thing to displease God. They laid guilt and shame on her by the bucketfuls, and they treated her with contempt.

Why? Simply because she was sick. Simply because she had an unmentionable physical problem. Simply because she'd had this flow of blood for twelve years. For twelve long years, her society had battered her. They wouldn't let her go to parties or to weddings or to the marketplace or to church. They wouldn't let her go anywhere she might touch another person. Think of what that would do to you emotionally and mentally, and socially and spiritually. This woman was tremendously in need of a little compassion.

Jesus saw this woman as a whole person who needs total healing: physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually. Jesus was pleased by her touching and her saying, “I believed that if I could just touch your clothing, I could be made well. So I touched your clothing and it had worked.”

Jesus commended her, “Daughter your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.” She received the compensation of her faith from Jesus with total healing and blessing.

Returning to the first question and answer: “What is the purpose of your life?” “To glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” Let me ask again, “Then how can we please God?” The Bible says, “Without faith it is impossible to please God for whoever would approach him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek him.” (Hebrews 11:6)

In any occasion, whether we have problems or not, to be a people of faith is the way to please God. We are not people of fear but people of faith. By faith we can see the problems as gifts to please God.

Oscar Hammerstein paraphrases in this way:

A bell is not a bell till you ring it.

A song is not a song till you sing it.

Love is not put into your heart to stay –Love is only love when you give it away.

Faith is action toward God, not an assertion or definition about God. To please God is worship service by offering, not lip-service without offering. Worship is not worship until we offer our total life to God.