

“I Want My Flowers While I’m Living”

Did you hear the story – true story – of the man who decided he *had* to save a Bear from drowning? The story was on the News on television with photos! A couple of fellows are at the Gulf of Mexico, by Florida, and they spot a large Bear - about 375 pounds – going out into the deep water. And they think together: the Bear is NOT going to make it to the other side.

This everyday human being says to his buddy: “I’ve *got* to *SAVE* this Bear!” He ripped off his shirt, and ran into the water. On T.V., this man said, “At first the Bear acted like he wanted to go for me.....the Bear was a little aggressive! Then a wave came – and it kind of *shocked* the bear. The wave calmed the Bear down. This man put his arm around this huge Bear and eventually brought this Bear to shore!! His friend had several photographs to prove it. Cool story.

I’ve started this sermon this morning with this “Bear story” *because* some human beings might be more concerned and show more compassion for a 375 pound Bear than they would for their frail, elderly loved one or their ill friend. Not necessarily the man in the story on television: I believe *he* would care very much for another human being - no matter what his or her age or condition.

But: what about you or me? This is an area in our modern society and the religious community that I believe needs attention. As some of you know I work as a Chaplain in a retirement/nursing home (much more the latter than the former)- about 120 residents. I’ve been calling on some of these residents for over five years. I have a group on Thursday afternoons; any of the residents can come. Some come without fail (with wheelchairs and help), some come once in a while, some come and sleep! We call our group “God’s children.” We discuss important and interesting topics, including religion. If Murray and I go on a vacation, I bring back “things” and stories to share with them.

These people, these “children of God” are cared for, and the staff are very dedicated. But I’m concerned about the relationship of these human beings and *You!* And, of course, not just the 120 persons where I work, but God’s daughters and sons everywhere who are dependent on *us* - in retirement homes, nursing homes, in their own homes – and *maybe* in your home!

Every week we sing hymns in the Christian Church, like the Doxology:

“Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,

“Praise Him all creatures here below.....”

I am convinced that when you or I pay attention to the sick and the elderly, we are *praising God*! One of my favorite hymns is “Praise Ye the Lord,” written over *330 years ago* by Joachim Neander. Trans. By Catherine Winkworth, 1863. (The Hymnbook, Presbyterian Church in the United States, c. 1955, page 1.)

“Praise Ye the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation!

O my soul, praise Him, for He is thy health and salvation!

All ye who hear, Now to His temple draw near;

Join me in glad adoration!”

Do we think or believe that praising God in the sanctuary is enough? I’m convinced many religious people think so! Come, worship God, and I’ve done my duty. Sometimes, people do not connect up “praising their Creator” and “living out” that *praise* the other six days of the week.

Dr. William Bruggeman is Professor of Old Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary in Georgia. I heard him speak in Syracuse, New York while I was at the General Assembly in 1997. One of his books is *The Psalms – The Life of Faith*. He writes concerning the *prayers* we know as Psalms: “The initial speakers of these words understood that prayer cannot be thought, but must be spoken.”

To me this says; it is not enough to think Christ-like thoughts, we are called to *speak* Christ-like thoughts. We must *act*, not solely sit and praise God, not solely worship God in spirit and truth on Sundays.

Do you recall when Saul was on the road to Damascus and “breathing “ murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples?? And he heard a voice.....

“Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?’ ‘Who are you, Lord?’ Saul asked. ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.’ He replied. ‘Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.’” (Acts 9: 4-6)

Jesus did *not* say, “Go to the synagogue and worship my Father.” Jesus said, “Go into the city and you will be told what you must *do* .”

There are things you and I are to DO as followers of Jesus Christ.

We pray in the Psalms; we pray though the Psalms:

“Teach me Your way, O Lord, and I will walk in Your truth; give me an undivided heart.....I will praise you, O Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify Your Name forever, for great is Your love toward me.” (Psalm 86)

Dr. Brueggemann tells us: “to bless is to bestow the power for life.”

THAT is what you and I are called to *do* for the sick and the elderly. We are *not* the healer. God is the Healer. We are the *caregivers*. We bring (*if we come !*) *the power for life to this particular child of God – while she or he is living! We are messengers for God. We are Jesus hands and feet.....and Heart!*

My goal for all of us who hear this sermon this morning is for us to consciously realize that we are *called* to bring Christ and His blessings to the sick and the elderly wherever they are.

People will say to you and to me: “I can’t visit a nursing home! *I can’t take seeing people frail or sick.*” This is not an acceptable excuse for a disciple of Jesus Christ. When you and I go visit the sick – when we do something concrete for the elderly – we are praising our God! Their Creator, our Creator.

“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me.” When we bless the elderly and the ill, we bless our Lord! People –even Christians- are not doing enough of *this in our day and age.*

Did your Mother ever say: “I want my flowers while I’m living”? My Mother used to say it. What does the person mean when he or she says this? It may be your Mother or your friend or someone you just met. I believe they mean more than

The Little Boy and the Old Man

Said the little boy, "Sometimes I drop my spoon."

Said the little old man, "I do that too."

The little boy whispered, "I wet my pants."

"I do that too," laughed the old man.

Said the little boy, "I often cry."

The old man nodded. "So do I."

"But worst of all," said the boy, "it seems

Grown-ups don't pay attention to me."

And he felt the warmth of a wrinkled old hand.

"I know what you mean," said the little old man.

Shel Silverstein

Shel Silver

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flowers! This child of God wants other people's attention – and consideration and love – *now!* - *while it can bring "the power of life" to them.* It's hard to enjoy attention and consideration and love - and beautiful flowers – when you are no longer breathing!

This is not a topic to be heard on Sunday morning and then forgotten. We of the Church of Jesus Christ need to "take up" His ways --of compassion, concern, and the giving of our time on a one-to-one basis.

Yes, it takes *time* to visit the sick and the lonely. Every week I hear...."I'm homesick." "I'm lonely." "I just want to go home." "My children don't care about me. They're too busy."

Hear about "The Little Boy and the Old Man" by the late author Shel Silverstein....

Our Lord apparently wanted to know if Simon Peter was His very close follower and if he really loved Him. The Son of God wanted to teach what was really important for ^{his} disciple to DO – if he was going to follow Jesus. It's not a new scripture. It's nearly 2000 years old. It's a wonderful scripture – full of wonder!

We need to study it: John 21: 15-17

"When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?' 'Yes, Lord', he said, 'You know that I love You.' Jesus said, 'Feed my lambs.' Again Jesus said, 'Simon son of John, do you truly love Me?' He answered, 'Yes, Lord, you now that I love You.' Jesus said, 'Take care of My sheep.'"...Jesus asked Simon Peter a third time the same question.

This is, I personally believe, one of the most basic scriptures in the entire Bible. Jesus shows us how important it is to "feed His sheep." He was not usually a

“pushy” person. He wanted to leave no doubt in Simon Peter’s mind what he *must* do if he loves this Man Jesus, his Master.

“Feed my Sheep” – these three words should be right up there with:

The Ten Commandments, The Golden Rule, the Beatitudes, and 1 Corinthians 13.

NOT a lot of choice here. “I can’t visit nursing homes doesn’t fit in”!

You who are sitting in front of me have so much to give. Remember the hymn by Washington Gladden, “O Master, Let me walk with Thee in lowly paths of service free” ?

A nurse told me this story, a true story. She knows it is true; she was the nurse.

A lady was in a nursing home for five years. The family did *not* visit her. One day the lady died. SOON the family came into the nursing home. One of the family said to this nurse: “What did you DO to this woman?” The nurse shared with me, “I could feel the tears running down my face.” The doctor happened to be in the room. He said to this family:

“Let me explain this to you. The staff here gave your mother a Christmas party. They were with her 24/7. You did *not* come and visit. Your Mother died of a broken heart!”

This doctor said what needed to be said. Could this mother have possibly “wanted her flowers” while she was living?? AND, her family’s attention and compassion and love --and their *time*?

Honor your father and your mother. Honor your friend. Honor your elderly church member, who may be out of your sight on Sunday mornings. Honor your sick neighbor and the ill little child. Honor God’s children – as you would want to be honored.....and lovedand cared for.

I’m sure some people visit the sick and elderly as often as they can. BUT I have witnessed that it is not a large percentage of our population – or of church congregations.

If you have no one to visit in particular, call a nursing or retirement home and ask *Who* needs a visit from a concerned and caring person. Or ask a pastor or a rabbi, or someone who would know. Many persons in these homes have *no* visitors. It makes for a long day.....a long week....a very long year. And remember, people who are still in their homes.....it may be your next-door neighbor!

A sermon is something particular. It is not the same as a book or a novel. A sermon is not really a sermon unless or until it is heard and “put to work” by the hearer. Allow me to conclude today with a tale I read in a book by a Jewish Rabbi. Wayne Dosick has written a bookGolden Rules: The Ten Ethical Values Parents Need to Teach Their Children. It’s a wonderful book for all of us, not just parents.....

Read slowly –

Amen.

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Listen closely!

There was an old man who lived in his son's house. Life was very pleasant for him: he had his own room, with ample space for all his things; his son and daughter-in-law treated him well; there was a young grandson in whom he took great delight.

Every evening, the family gathered around a large round table for dinner. There, they shared good food and quiet conversation. The man was happy and content.

As the years went by, the old man's health began to fail. His hands began to shake, and, sometimes, because of his trembling hands, he would spill his tea or drop his plate.

With each spill, the son became more and more upset with his father.

One evening, as the family sat around the dinner table, the man accidentally hit his bowl with his soup spoon, and the bowl broke, spilling soup all over the table.

The man's son jumped up from his place and shouted at his father, "What's wrong with you? You are so clumsy. If you can't

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eat properly at our table, you will have to eat alone in your room. I'm tired of you spilling food and breaking our good dishes."

The next day, the son brought home a wooden bowl, and, from then on, the old man ate his dinner in his own room, out of his wooden bowl. He said nothing to his son or daughter-in-law, but being away from his family at dinnertime pained him very much.

One day, when the son came home from work, he found his young boy sitting at the workbench in the garage, quietly working on a project.

"What are you making?" he asked.

His young son proudly held up his work. "I am making a wooden bowl. I am carving it all by myself."

"A wooden bowl?" asked his father. "What will you use it for? We already have such beautiful dishes."

And the little boy answered, "I know, Dad, but I'm making this bowl for you, when you grow old like Grandpa, and come to live with me. When your hands begin to shake and you break my plates, I'll have this bowl ready for you to use in your room."

When the father heard this, he immediately ran to his own father and fell to his knees. "Father, my father, I am so sorry. Please, please forgive me for not showing you the respect and honor that is rightly yours."

And that night, the whole family sat together again at the big round dining room table.

A Man