

Weekly Devotional

For the week of March 14, 2010



Find this devotional online each week at
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We are a listening church

Being inspired by Christ as we hear the Bible speak in its historical context

Bible Background

This week, we focus on those who care for the lost, the least, the sick, and the dying. As we think about people who work or volunteer to care for those who suffer, like chaplains or hospice workers, it brings two questions to mind.

1. Why do people suffer?
2. Who (in their right mind) would want to be around those people?

While human beings are still trying to figure out an adequate answer to the first question, the second question is well addressed by the theologian and medical ethicist Stanley Hauerwas. He writes:

“As much as we fear suffering, we fear more the loneliness that accompanies it. To suffer is to have our identity threatened physically, psychologically, and morally. Thus, our suffering makes us even more unsure of who we are....”

...It is not surprising that we should have trouble with the suffering of others. None of us willingly seeks to enter in to the loneliness of others. We fear such loneliness may result in loss of control of our own life. We may be right about that, but we may also fail to understand the kind of help they really need. Too often we seek to do something rather than first simply learn how to be with, to be present to, the sufferer in his or her loneliness.”

What is the significance of being present to another person who is struggling with something that we are not? In doing so, we are practicing the ministry of reconciliation that Paul writes about. As ambassadors of Christ, who reconciled the entire world to God, we take a small and broken part of the world and help to integrate it—to reconcile it—with a caring community and with a God who gives us our identity and our purpose.

Christ sees that the troubles of the world do not define it—instead, Christ sees creation as the good thing God made it to be. In the same way, we are to look on those whose very identity is in question and instead see them as precious children of God whose identity is greater than their circumstances.

Question for reflection

What does the “ministry of reconciliation” look like to you?

We are a learning church

Learning to love and serve with all people by drawing upon the resources of our culture, the arts, and the stories of our own lives

Quotes for the week

“Loneliness is the first thing which God's eye named, not good.”

(John Milton)

“The most terrible poverty is loneliness, and the feeling of being unloved.”

(Mother Teresa)

“What should young people do with their lives today? Many things, obviously. But the most daring thing is to create stable communities in which the terrible disease of loneliness can be cured.”

(Kurt Vonnegut)

“I could sooner reconcile all Europe than two women.”

(King Louis XIV of France, who attempted to reconcile Protestants and Catholics by simply forcing all Protestants to become Catholic).

Question for reflection

Is caring for prisoners, or for the dying, only about the individual receiving the care? Or, is there some value to a society that provides this kind of care?

We are a church that seeks to be a spiritual home

Restoring all creation to God's loving embrace—one relationship at a time

Question for reflection

When it comes to caring for others, what kinds of relationships between professional chaplains and the rest of us would produce the best results?

Scriptures

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First reading: **2 Corinthians 5:16-20**

From: The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.

So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

Gospel: **Matthew 25: 31-40**

From: The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Jesus said, “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

“Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’

“And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’”