

2007-9-30, Amos 6.1a,4-7, Ps 146. 1 Tim 6:6-19, Luke 16:19-31

Grace and peace be yours from God our Father and the Lord Jesus.

Our series on getting connected has described the many ways in which the Lord makes us for relationship and ministry—relationship with him and our neighbor—to the earth and all its creatures. As we explore our gifts, our personalities, our experiences, our natural abilities, our opportunities to serve, Christ’s intentions for us become obvious...so what gets in the way? Jesus tells the sad pathetic story of the rich man who had many opportunities to get connected to God’s work by helping Lazarus, whom he passed by every day and witnessed in glowing color and smell—his need...his poverty...and yet did absolutely nothing to alleviate Lazarus’ suffering. Even the dogs realized Lazarus’ need and lick his wounds. But the rich man does not even notice Lazarus until he himself is in Hades and suffering thirst. He begs Abraham or Lazarus to help him by giving him just a drop of water. Lazarus might have been willing, but Abraham says the chasm between them is too deep and permanent. The rich man is suddenly stricken with compassion for his brothers who were living self centered uncompassionate lives, but Abraham says they have already had every chance...even someone raised from the dead will have no meaning for them.

In its own way the story invites us to be different, to make a difference. while we have the chance—to get connected to kingdom work now. So what gets in the way? What is the problem?

In the book Shape the author lists the five "Ws" as things that get in the way. I suspect human capacity to sin—to turn from God’s purposes—is actually endless. Only through personal surrender do we come to the feet of God to make our confession and lean into his grace. Still we can explore the categories Erik Reese raises.

Worries! How many times are mission and ministry thwarted because of worries? We worry about money...who is going to pay for this... from whence shall the money come? What is the legal ramification of this effort...are we open to litigation? If we help this person or support this effort and not another, who will we offend? What if we fail or things don’t turn out right? What if the object of our attention begins to expect more than we want to give? Jesus says at the very beginning of his ministry, “Do not worry about your life ...but strive first for the Kingdom of God.” While thinking about going to seminary I worried a great deal about how the bills would be paid, where we would live, how we would afford a move.” A mentor said, “Do not worry about the money ...if it is of God you cannot stop it. Pray, and get out of the way!” How many times I would rest in those words.

Wounds! Most of us are wounded...the walking wounded. We learn to hide our sores and scars pretty well...in fact we tell ourselves we are healed and that all is well, but as soon as the issue comes up again we are focused anew on the wounds. What is so interesting about servant hood and ministry is that the wounds are our best gifts. Wounds help us to identify with our neighbor and their wounds. Our wounds help us to reach out to others in the midst of their trials so we can authentically say, “Trust me, you can do this!” So many times I have been helped through trials by listening to the trial of another. Like Thomas I have placed my hands in their wounds and realized I too could survive the current crisis. The wound becomes a gift for the future of others.

Wrongs! Most of us become very good at putting our wrongs, our resentments, our rejections, in a small garbage bag that we carry on our backs for years and years. The bag gets bigger and bigger and smellier. Then one day something happens and the bag will no longer hold all the resentments and wrongs we have carried for so long and anger comes pouring out. At that point we have a choice...we can try to patch the bag with duck tape, or we can tear open the bag we have carried for so long...it usually smells pretty bad by then, and we can sort through it all...throwing most of it away and keeping only what is precious. There will be a couple treasures. We can decide to join the human race and accept the fact that we are broken and at times despised just as Jesus was. We can forgive those who have failed to measure up to our standards. We can forgive ourselves and trust in God’s grace. It is a very hard for most...a time of reckoning ...a time to surrendering to God that which pains us. God can transform our losses and heartaches into energies of love that heal the world.

Weakness! What gets in the way of getting connected? Jesus loves to use our weaknesses for the glory of God...not so much our strengths...and, oh, how we hate that. We tend to want to shine in our own gifts and to show how capable we are. But God asks us to go where we have fear and trepidation...into the unknown territory and to lean on him, to trust in his mercy, instead of our own strength. Paul, a fine upstanding Roman Citizen, a practicing orthodox Jew, a man trained in Pentateuch—here were his credentials—is sent to the gentiles where all his training and status has no merit. I can’t tell you the number of times during the process of my secondary education I had to give a speech. I would become so rattled that I literally could not stand. My legs would shake so badly. I could not look at those listening. My peers laughed at me. Once even the teach laughed. The fear of public speaking, of public attention was huge. So where does the Lord ask me to go?

Wishes! God gives us our dreams and will help us bring them to pass. As a child I was pretty much taught not to have dreams. As a daughter I was told you will do what we tell you...you will go where we send you...your ideas are impractical and you need to give them up...you will be a mother like other women and raise your children. Your education is simply an insurance policy. I learned to be quiet (I am sure you find that hard to believe.) I learned to hide my dreams. But when Jesus came I could not do that anymore and the journey of faith was an unbelievable fruition of dreams that I didn’t even know I had...that I could not image coming to pass. I moved forward—waiting, expecting the doors to slam shut—really expecting to fail. But as did my dreams became reality, my faith grew.

I tell people that mission and ministry requires one thing...a person with a dream from God, a passion, a vision. That is our life in Christ. The enemy will whisper, "You can't do that...your too...whatever, no one will listen to you, you have no gifts for that...have you lost your mind.?" But no one can stop you if you are in the midst of God's dream for you. And what is more exciting than that?

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