

“You Can Mark a Christian by One Who Connects With Others”

Date: March 17, 2011

Place: St. Paul’s Lutheran

Church

Texts: 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; Romans 12:3-8

Theme: Listening, connecting, saved *for* others

Occasion: Lenten Luncheon series, week 2

Good afternoon, and “top of the day to ya.” Happy St. Patrick’s Day to all of you who are Irish, and all of the rest of us who pretend to be, today. I wore a little green today for the occasion, including my Veggie Tale tie; it’s the only green tie I own. And I’ve got a couple of Irish stories to tell ye, today.

You see, Paddy was in New York. He was waiting, and watching the traffic cop on a busy street crossing. The cop stopped the flow of traffic and shouted, “Okay, pedestrians.” Then he’d allow the traffic to pass. He did this several times, and Paddy stood patiently on the sidewalk.

After the cop had shouted “Pedestrians” for the tenth time, Paddy went over and said to him, “Is it not about time ye let the Catholics cross?”

One more. An Irish priest is driving to New York and gets stopped for speeding in Connecticut. The state trooper smells alcohol on the priest’s breath and then he sees an empty wine bottle on the floor of the car. He says, “Father, have you been drinking?”

“Just water,” says the priest. The trooper says, “Then why do I smell wine?” The priest looks at the bottle and says, “Good Lord! That Jesus, He’s done it again!”

The theme for today’s message is this: “You can mark a Christian by one who connects with others.” There are two verses in today’s readings that stand out. In the passage from Corinthians, Paul says “The bread that we eat, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we all who are many are one

body, for we all partake of one bread.”

And in Romans we read, “So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.” You can mark a Christian, by one who connects with others. You can mark a Christian, by one who connects with others.

Another story. As a young girl, “Little Annie” was diagnosed as being hopelessly insane. She was locked up in a mental institution. But an elderly nurse believed there was hope for this child, and day after day she would visit with her, even though she was often reprimanded for wasting her time.

Over a long period of time, Little Annie gradually improved, and was finally released from that institution. Filled with compassion for others because of what she herself had gone through, Anne Sullivan, whose own life had been miraculously opened, was able to open the life of Helen Keller - whom we all know was born blind and deaf and unable to communicate.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, is that not what our Lord Jesus has done for us - set us free from the prison of sin and death. As we move through the season of Lent we are painfully reminded of our sins and shortcomings, not to fill ourselves with shame and guilt, but to remind us why our Savior died. Jesus, our Lord, died on the cross so that we could be free.

Free from the tyranny of living only for ourselves. Free from the tyranny of selfishness and pride. Free from the tyranny of lust and anger and gluttony. Jesus freed us, by his death and resurrection, so that we could stop living just for ourselves. And so I would remind us, You can mark a Christian by one who connects with others.”

I think the world is hungry for genuine, authentic Christianity. I think the

world is tired of worn-out cliches, and the easy answers, and the pompous attitude that assumes we have all the answers and everybody else is wrong.

People are attracted to Christians who are genuine, who are sincere, who are authentic. I invite, across all our different denominations, to take off the phony faces that we sometimes wear and become real people. In today's world, if we want to reach the unchurched, the person who doesn't know Jesus yet, we need to be real.

For that, I think we need to do a better job of listening to other people. I believe that is the key to connecting. Learning how to listen, so that people feel that they matter. Another story, to illustrate.

A family went into a restaurant. The waitress walked up and looking at the young boy said, "What will it be?" The boy eagerly shouted back, "I'll take a hamburger, French fries and a shake."

The mother immediately interrupted, "Oh, that's not what he wants. He'll take the roast beef, a baked potato and a glass of milk." Much to the surprise of both the mother and the boy, the waitress completely ignored her and again asked the boy -

"And what do you want on that hamburger?"

The boy shouted back, "Ketchup. Lots of ketchup." And what kind of shake?

"Make it chocolate." The waitress left to fill the order and the boy turned to his parents, with a big smile on his face and said, "Say, ain't she something! She thinks I'm real."

Listen to me church. Let me give you fair warning. If you once, just once, really start to listen to what people are saying, they are suddenly going to become real to you.

You're going to feel their pain. You're going to understand their struggles. And you're going to connect with them. Listening is the key to connecting. It is an act of love.

We can start practicing our listening skills at home, in church, in Bible study, in Sunday School classes. No, really start listening. Paying attention to what the other person is saying, and taking them seriously. Some of us need extra practice.

Christian author and speaker, Chuck Swindoll once found himself with too many commitments. He was getting nervous and tense about all of his obligations. He was snapping at his wife and children, gulping his food down at meal-times, and always feeling as though he were running behind. He says, "Before too long, our home started reflecting my *hurry-up* style of living." He goes on to say -

"I distinctly remember after supper one evening, the words of our youngest daughter, Colleen. She wanted to tell me something important about what happened that day. She began hurriedly, "Daddy, I wanna tell you something, and I'll be fast."

Suddenly, realizing her frustration, I answered, "Honey, it's okay, you can tell me about your day and you don't have to tell me really fast. Say it slowly." Swindoll says that he'll never forget her answer. She said, "Then listen, *slowly*, Daddy."

My friends, if we as Christians want to be heard in this world of ours, we had better start practicing our listening skills. We need to listen to the needs of those who are hurting. When kids act out, when they put graffiti on the walls, they're not necessarily trying to be bad. They're trying to tell us about who they are. But do we take the time to listen to what the kids are saying? Loving is caring. Caring means listening.

I'd like to conclude by quoting from the devotional book given to us who

are preaching this lenten series.

“So often I think that fulfillment of life is simply to know the love of God in secret silence, resting wordlessly in the sea of God’s mercy, sweet moments of grace. So I cut myself off from others, wanting to be alone, all the while fearing that if they stand too close to me for very long they will see my deficiencies, which God and I know all too well.

But the agitation of my failure tells me how wrong I am. The fulfillment of life is not private awareness of God’s love. It is to be connected with others in a sea of love that flows from one heart to another, connecting us flesh-to-flesh so that the illusion of our separateness is washed away.”

You can mark a Christian, by one who connects with others. Amen? Amen!