

“It’s a God Thing”

Season of Pentecost, Sunday, October 13, 2013

Pulpit Swap Sunday

Sermon for Gentle Spirit Christian Church

in Candler Park, Atlanta, Georgia

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Scriptures: Luke 17: 11-19; Ephesians 4: 7, 11-16

Luke 17 -- Jesus Cleanses Ten Lepers

*11 On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. ¹²As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, ¹³they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” ¹⁴When he saw them, he said to them, **“Go and show your selves to the priests.”** And as they went, they were made clean.*

15 Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. ¹⁶He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan.

*17 Then Jesus asked, **“Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? ¹⁸Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?”** ¹⁹Then he said to him, **“Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”***

Ephesians 4: 7, 11-16

7 But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift.

11 The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

14 We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming.

15 But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

It's a God thing.

Jesus was on the road to Jerusalem.

Samaria lay to the southwest.

Galilee was northwest.

As Jesus came to a small village,

ten lepers from Samaria approached him.

They kept their distance.

They called out, "*Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!*"

The term "master" appears only in Luke,

and always on the lips of disciples.

Jesus responds by telling the Samaritans to go to their priests for purification.

You can read more about this process of spiritual and physical healing

in Leviticus 13 and 14.

Later, when one of them saw that he was healed,

he turned back, praising God with a loud voice.

He prostrated himself on the ground at Jesus' feet,

and thanked him.

This is what a person might do as an act of obeisance

before a ruler or a divine being.

After observing that only one of the ten had returned to give thanks,

Jesus said to him,

“Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”

The Samaritan's thanks rises out of his insights into the person of Jesus.

He sees in Jesus of Nazareth the nature and nurture of God.

He sees in Jesus that he is the Messiah,

the Living Christ,

the ultimate agent of the God of grace and God of glory.

He sees in Jesus one who has come not only to save the world;

he sees that Christ came to save him and his friends, body, mind and soul.

He's bolstered by the good counsel and support of God.

Jesus Christ begins the healing process

by lifting up the strengths of the Samaritan.

We can read and understand that Christ has counsel for all who would follow.

- Stay connected to the divine within you.
- Get up and go to the temple of God and rededicate your life.
- Recognize that God is doing mighty works in and through you.
- Have a deep sense of awe for the mighty works of God.
- Give thanks for all the good and the many blessings you have received.
- Get up and go your way,
becoming the one that God continually calls into being.

It's a God thing.

It's a people thing.

In nearby Stone Mountain there is a remarkable not-for-profit organization

called Side by Side Brain Injury Clubhouse.

Cindi Johnson is currently the Executive Director of Side by Side Clubhouse.

Cindi obtained a Master's Degree in Psychology

with a concentration in Behavioral Neuroscience
from Georgia State University in 1989.
After a 15 year career as a Cognitive Rehabilitation Therapist
and administrator in post acute rehabilitation,
Cindi directed her passion for supporting people with brain injuries
to the development of a clubhouse model program
for life-long psychosocial, cognitive and vocational
support.
Side by Side Clubhouse opened in 1999
as the only program of its kind in the southeastern United States
for survivors of brain injury. (bio from Decatur Rotary website)

One of the experiences that kindled a flame within Cindi Johnson
was a friend's recovery from a brain injury.

Her friend had been in an accident while traveling overseas,
and she returned home to Decatur
to begin the long, slow journey of healing and rehabilitation.

Cindi says that to this day she can vividly recall her friend's voice
as she shared her frustration.

Her friend said, "*Do you know what rehab is?*"

Rehab is doing what you cannot do, over and over again."

Cindi thought, "*We need to build people up.*"

There is more to healing, more to life

than doing only what is most difficult.

Let's start with folks' strengths."

So Cindi responded by beginning Side by Side Clubhouse with some colleagues
so that those with brain injuries

would have a positive support network and program,

one that would affirm their gifts in a communal context,

and in so doing, build up their body, mind, and
soul.

At the Side by Side Club House clients are asked,

"What can you do? What are your strengths? What are your gifts?"

And then programs and projects and plans are designed

based on what people can accomplish

and in which they may succeed.

Divine relationships are grounded in love for God and one another.

It's a God thing and a people thing. And it's a Church thing.

There is a powerful, clear overlap here

between what Jesus did with people that

He encountered on the highways and byways

and alleyways and pathways of life,

and the way we're called to practice the stewardship of our relationships. .

Start with strengths.

I am a firm believer in the power of small victories.

Small successes, small accomplishments build one upon the other.

Furthermore, the power of a community of faith can overcome whatever ails us.

People united together for a common cause

that is good and bigger than themselves

will build one another up

and become stronger and better and transformed.

We call this Church.

That is why we never go to church.

We have church.

Thanks be to God, one of the many reasons we have this church

is to help all of us be better stewards of one another,

better caretakers of our relationships.

Christ-centered relationships start with seeing the divine in one another,
and then seeking out ways to build one another up.

In 2007, the space shuttle Discovery was grounded

– not by technical difficulties or funding problems but by woodpeckers.

Yellow shafted flicker woodpeckers discovered

Discovery's external fuel tank irresistible material for pecking.

The shuttle was grounded until the damage was repaired,

and then it soared toward the stars.

Our relationships are built one smile, one kind word, one prayer, one act of grace,
one shared insight and thought at a time.

They can be damaged by the big problems – abuse or abandonment or neglect –

or by the little things,

like the pecking of small birds at the same point over and over.

Ungrounded and cruel criticism,

lack of respect,

taking each other for granted,

seeking to be right rather than reconciled,

all can keep us from reaching the heights of
love.

Christ gives us an alternative.

Just as God sees the good, the strengths and grace within you,

see the same in one another.

See the divine that is so alive in your midst and give thanks.

There is a relatively new field of practical therapy called coaching.

Coaches work to bring out the best in a client,
often by bolstering, encouraging, and lifting up your strengths.

Coaching “is a one-on-one relationship
where a coach helps you take the actions you want
to take to reach a goal.

Coaches are personal change experts
who help people to fulfill their destiny.

Professionally trained in a unique set of leadership skills,
coaches help others identify important goals and priorities,
strategize about how to reach them,
and overcome obstacles that crop up along the way.”

(Life-forming Leadership Coaching, Website)

You can find a coach for any career or ministry, any occupation or vocation.

In a way, the practice of coaching is not new.

God has been coaching people
to love people and to love God from the beginning.

One thing our church has in common with modern day coaching
is our commitment to help folks start with strengths,
overcome obstacles,
and fulfill their destiny.

The scriptures proclaim, “...*Each of us was given grace
according to the measure of Christ’s gift.*

11 The gifts Christ gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets,

*some evangelists, some pastors and teachers,
12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry,
for building up the body of Christ..."*

The work of the ministry we do is to build up the body.

Each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift.

The gifts Christ gave to each of us
were so we would have skills and talents and gifts
for building up the body of Christ.

We'll start right here and now
by building up one another
for the glory of God.

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!