

We are Making a Difference through. . . Mission to the Community

Or:

May 11, 2008

Year A: Pentecost

Chadron United Methodist Church; Chadron, Nebraska

There was a fire one day, and the fire fighter charged to the scene of the fire with his fellow fire fighters and heavy equipment. As they came toward the fire, much to their surprise and chagrin, they encountered between themselves and the flames about 200 townspeople. And each of them was standing there with a water pistol, aiming at the fire, going squirt, squirt, squirt, squirt.

The fire fighter asked, "What's going on here?"

A spokesperson for the group turned and said, "Well, we all appreciate this wonderful work you're doing in our community, and each of us has come to contribute in some small way to your work." Squirt, squirt.

The fire fighter said, "I don't get it. You are all crazy!"

"Oh we realize that we all could do more, couldn't we folks?" said the spokesperson.

"Most definitely," everyone said, "But we just wanted to offer this token of our support." Squirt, squirt.

"You don't know what you're doing!" shouted the fire fighter.

"True, but you have to appreciate the fact that everyone is willing to offer whatever help they can," said the spokesperson.

And everyone said, "Amen!" and went squirt, squirt.

At that, the firefighter shouted, "Get the !@# out of here! This is no picnic, this is a fire, and a fire doesn't require well-meaning people who come to make small contributions. A fire is a place where people come to give their lives."¹

Today we do not discuss mere contributions. Today, there is no more talk. Today, we move beyond a token contribution to the very act of giving everything we've got. Today, the talk ends and the walk begins. You see, today is the culmination of everything we've been talking about in this sermon series. We are A Church Family that Makes a Difference and we will live this out. You see each of our Core Values describes something unique about us. They describe who we are, what we want to become, where we are going, and what we want to do. And now that you have been introduced to our Core Values, now that you know who we are, it is now time to do something about it. Today, We are Making a Difference through Mission to the Community.

[Luke 4:18 \(NRSV\)](#)

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free,

Folks, you've heard me preach for quite some time now and you know I like my heaven stories. Here is one for you:

¹ Wayne Rice. *More HOT Illustrations for Youth Talks: 100 MORE attention-getting stories, parables, & anecdotes.* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: ZondervanPublishingHouse. 1995.) 156.

A bus load of ladies from the United Methodist Women had a tragic accident and they were all killed. All 50 arrived at the Pearly Gates together.

Saint Peter was taken by surprise and said that due to redecorating there wasn't room for them so they would have to spend a little time in hell until their mansion was ready. The devil reluctantly agreed to offer them the temporary accommodation.

Three weeks later Saint Peter phoned down to hell to say that all was now ready and the ladies could be sent to heaven. "Couldn't I keep them just a little longer?" pleaded the devil.

"Why?" enquired Saint Peter.

"Well, only two more cake sales and we've raised enough for air conditioning!"²

It is amazing what we can do if we put our mind to it. In my short tenure as a pastor I have some incredible things get done with just a little bit of organization – a strong vision – and more importantly, the drive to serve. Under these three auspices some incredible fruit has been produced.

Last week I told you about that Mission trip to Mexico while I was serving in a previous appointment. Our first year everything was brand new. We had 10 youth and 5 adults, we had a church to stay at, a project to do, and more importantly a will to serve. But we also had our struggles. We did not have the right tools. Our leadership while in Mexico was not helpful and the quality of wood – if you could call it quality – was pathetic. We had fights and serious disagreements. We had youth get sick. But talk about fruit: we built three homes, we made incredible friends, and we grew. The next year we voted overwhelmingly to go back and this time you could see that fruit. We went from 10 youth to 18 with many returnees. But we also had our challenges: we went from one van to two, we needed more adult sponsors, and much much more money. We had our will, we had our workers, but we needed money and we made a plea to the congregation. One Sunday morning I put out the vision to the congregation of what we wanted to accomplish and just a week before we were to leave, Ted walked into my office. He said, "you built three homes last year for people that had nothing. Here is a check to make it happen again this year."

Folks, this is what we are talking about today – people who make a difference and it all starts by laying out the vision, providing clear cut values, and then just watching the Holy Spirit go to work. This is what we are doing by living into and out our Core Values. We are and we will be A Church Family that Makes a Difference. And to make this happen, to be the difference makers that God want us to be, to act as if the Spirit of the Lord is upon us, then we must step up to the plate and not just offer a mere contribution but be the people we say we are going to be.

A drunk was miraculously converted at a Bowery mission. Prior to his conversion, Joe had gained the reputation of being a dirty wino for whom there was no hope, only a miserable existence in the ghetto. But following his conversion to a new life with God, everything changed. Joe became the most

² Neil Sydney. "Raising money for air conditioning." *Seth's Compiled List of Jokes & Illustrations, Part II*. 8.

caring person that anyone associated with the mission had ever known. Joe spent his days and nights hanging out at the mission doing whatever needed to be done. There was never any task that was too lowly for Joe to take on. There was never anything that he was asked to do that he considered beneath him. Whether it was cleaning up the vomit left by some violently sick alcoholic or scrubbing the toilets after careless men left the bathroom filthy, Joe did what was asked with a soft smile on his face and with a seeming gratitude for the chance to help. He could be counted on to feed feeble men who wandered into the mission off the street, and to undress and tuck into bed men who were too out of it to take care of themselves.

One evening, when the director of the mission was delivering his evening evangelistic message to the usual crowd of still and sullen men with drooped heads, there was one man who looked up, came down the aisle to the altar and knelt to pray, crying out for God to help him to change. The repentant drunk kept shouting, "Oh God, make me like Joe! Make me like Joe! Make me like Joe! Make me like Joe!"

The director of the mission leaned over and said to the man, "Son, I think it would be better if you prayed, 'Make me like *Jesus!*'"

The man looked up at the director with a quizzical expression on his face and asked, "Is he like Joe?"³

If we are to live out our Core Values, if we are to make a difference in this world, if we are to be the Church Family that Makes a Difference, then we must make it personal. We must make it our ministry. We must act as if people can see in our work the very hands of God. And everything we do must be done out of love. Out of love is the only the way the Spirit is going to get any fruit out of us. For if we don't have love then our service will become a simply obligation – a mere contribution – instead of giving our lives to an important mission for God.

A college professor had his sociology class go into the Baltimore slums to get case histories of 200 boys. For each boy's future, the students wrote, "He hasn't got a chance."

Twenty-five years later, another sociology professor had his students find out what had happened to these boys. Except for 20 boys who had moved away or died, 176 of the remaining 180 had achieved great success as lawyers, doctors, and businessmen.

The professor was astounded and pursued the matter further. Fortunately, he was able to ask each one of them, "How do you account for your success?"

In each case, the reply came with feeling, "There was a teacher."

The teacher was still alive, so the professor sought her out and asked what magic formula she had used to pull these boys into successful achievement.

The teacher's eyes sparkled. "It's really simple," she said. "I loved those boys."⁴

This love – this passion – one must have to serve is the reason we are offering this Mission & Service Fair today. We've contacted every volunteer

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⁴ Eric Butterworth. "From slums to success." *Seth's, Part V*. 25.

organization in town that we could think of and if you want to serve as well in our church we have places for you to sign up as well. Our goal, our challenge, is that we live out – we walk the talk – of our Mission Statement. Our Core Value is to make a difference and we will do this through mission, we will do this by service, we will do this by going beyond making a mere contribution. We must accept the movement of the Spirit to be upon us so that we can respond to the needs of the community. And we've got to do it with passion and love for our fellow brothers and sisters. For without that passion, for without that love, for without that mission to service we can not be A Church Family that Makes a Difference.

There was once a little boy who was walking along the beach and all of a sudden he came upon thousands of starfish that had washed up on the beach. The tide was going out, and for some strange reason, the starfish ended up stuck on the beach. They were all doomed because they couldn't survive being out of the water in the hot sun until the next high tide. The little boy realized this and frantically started picking up starfish and throwing them, one at a time, back into the water.

A man who was walking along the beach saw the boy doing this and he yelled at the boy, "So, what in the world are you doing? Don't you know that there are thousands of starfish on this beach? And don't you know that this beach goes on for miles and miles? There is no way in the world you can save all those starfish!"

The little boy thought about that for a moment, then turned to the man, picked up a starfish and said, "Yeah, I know. But I can save *this* one."

And he heaved it as far as he could into the ocean.⁵

Folks, it all starts with just one person, one project, one soul, one starfish at a time. To be A Church Family that Makes a Difference it starts with us. Amen.

⁵ Wayne Rice. 151.