

The Importance of Relationships

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Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church Rev. Dr. Eric Peterson

John 15:1-17

Relationships are powerful. They mold and shape our lives. The expression, we are better together is more than a slogan, it is the biblical truth. In Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 it says, ***“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up.”***

At our men's prayer breakfast this month, Paul Kruelle reminded us that science and scripture both agree on the importance of relationships. *“The Second Law of thermal dynamics states that there is a natural tendency of any isolated system to degenerate into a more disordered state (chaos).”* For example, we know that someone placed in solitary confinement can suffer greatly from isolation. Social isolation and social distancing may keep us safe from COVID-19, but it endangers all of us emotionally, spiritually, and physically. One of the lessons we get from today's Gospel is: The healthier our relationship with God and the healthier our relationships are with each other, the healthier our lives are and the healthier our whole community.

Steve Jobs, the former CEO of Apple, died a billionaire. And before he died, he wrote down these thoughts about life. He said, *“I reached the pinnacle of success in the business world. In other's eyes, my life was the epitome of success. However, aside from work, I have little joy. In the end, wealth is only a fact of life that I have been accustomed to. At this moment, I am on my sick bed, and recalling my life. I realize that all of the recognition and wealth in which I took so much pride, have*

become meaningless in the face of impending death.”

“Whatever stage in life we are at currently, in time we all face that day when the curtain comes down.” “Treasure love for your family, love for your spouse, and love for friends. Treat yourself well and cherish others.” - Michael Michalko -Pulse/LinkedIn
Powerful words from a man who knew success.

Last week Wally Davis and Don Holtz passed away. They were dear friends, who touched my life and blessed my faith. I am going to really miss them. Don’s daughter, Stacey shared with me a note that Don left behind in one of his notebooks. He wrote: *“The light I saw at OSWLC has been the people, not the building.”* This note really struck a chord with me because I remember when Bobbie and I first came to OSWLC we were greeted by Jim and Pat Sheehy. They were standing outside the front doors of the church and greeted us before we even got into the building. Pat was wearing a smile bigger than her beautiful audacious hat. Jim and Pat gave us such a warm welcome, we decided even before the worship service started that this was our church. This was home. Their hospitality and friendship touched our hearts. Over the years the relationships in this congregation have made this church special. This is one reason that relationships are front and center in our mission statement. Our mission statement is: *“At Our Savior’s Way, we glorify God and make disciples for Jesus by forming relationships, experiencing Jesus Together, and Sharing God’s Love.”* The first step in discipleship is always caring for others enough to take them into our hearts. It is only after people know that we care about them that they will care about what we know. This is especially true if we want to share our faith or talk to them about Jesus.

This morning Jesus is inviting each of us to renew our relationship with Him. He is inviting us to know Him personally and to experience His love so that He can empower us with His Holy Spirit to do the things of God. Jesus said, ***“I am the vine;***

you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up and thrown into the fire to be burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given to you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." (John 15:5-8)

Jesus' invitation is not an invitation to come to church or to do religious things. Jesus' invitation is to know Him and to share our lives with Him. My parents used to warn my sisters and me to choose our friends wisely because our friends will mold and shape our lives. And they were right. What is true for our friends is true for our relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus said that when we are connected to Him our lives will bear abundant fruit. They will overflow with blessings to those around us.

If there was ever a time that we needed to be near Jesus it is now. This is an anxious time. There are so many changes, so much anger, and so much division. It is no wonder people are seeking comfort wherever they can find it. Unfortunately, not everything really comforts. St. Augustine said that our hearts are made for God. We can't ever find the peace that we are looking for in the things that we do or in the things we possess or even in the people who are close to us. Only God can give us a peace that goes beyond understanding. Jesus is our peace from the guilt of sin. He takes away the fear of death. He gives us hope when our future is uncertain. He speaks His Word and offers us the healing that we need. Jesus said, ***"I am the vine and you are the branches. A branch cannot exist by itself. If it gets separated from the vine the branch withers and dies."***

In the Old Testament, the vine was a symbol for the people of God. In Psalm 80 it said that the people of God failed to trust in God and trusted in themselves. The further they moved away

from God...the more they lost their way. God did not abandon Israel. Israel abandoned God and their lives, and their nations suffered. As a result, God decided to raise up a shoot from Israel, the Son of Man. The Son of Man would fulfill what God's people were not able to do. He would fulfill God's law. He would even take our sin upon Himself and die for us on a cross so that removed any barrier that would separate us from God. Jesus said that if we believe in Him, we shall have eternal life. All of us are invited into a relationship with God just as we are. And the beauty of this relationship with Christ is that it transforms us so we can do the things of God. Our lives can bear good fruit and be a blessing. The Apostle John put it this way: ***"Dear Friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us."*** (1 John 4: 7-12)

When we know God's love and have experienced His embrace, His love compels us to reach out to others with the same love we have received from God. Forming relationships is at the heart of who God is and at the heart of who we are as people of God.