

Trinity United Methodist Church

September 29, 2019

“Lessons from Kindergarten:

Sharing: But I Don’t Want To”

Pastor Dan Elmore

Scripture: 1 Kings 17:8-16

Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. Then the word of the Lord came to him: “Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. I have directed a widow there to supply you with food.” So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, “Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?” As she was going to get it, he called, “And bring me, please, a piece of bread.” “As surely as the Lord your God lives,” she replied, “I don’t have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die.” Elijah said to her, “Don’t be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord sends rain on the land.’” She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah.

Sermon

Would you pray with me? Oh Lord, open our ears and our hearts. Let us hear what we need to hear and show us what we need to do to become more faithful disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. In His name we pray, amen.

So we’re finishing up this week our Back to School sermon series, Lessons from Kindergarten, that we can apply to life and to faith. We talked the first week about Picture Day, how we try to look perfect when in truth none of us are, and we’re completely dependent upon God’s grace and love for us to see us through. The second week we talked about Nap Time and how nap time is mandatory; I’m looking so forward

to mine this afternoon. But, how Sabbath is mandatory; how God created the Sabbath for us to take a break, to not work ourselves to death, and ultimately to enjoy God's presence in our lives and take time for that. Last week we talked about Sticks and Stones, that words indeed DO hurt, and how we can not just speak not badly of one another, but how we can try to speak well of each other and those in our lives.

And so today we're talking about Sharing. Sharing is a vital lesson that we learn in kindergarten, hopefully beforehand, but certainly by and in kindergarten. How to share and the importance of sharing. Whether it be toys or snacks or whatever the case might be, we need to share.

Now on the one hand, sharing seems very natural to us. And the kids I've encountered in my life, my own kids especially, when they're the littlest, they're so sweet generally, and they more readily share with you. But then at some point along the way there comes a point where they get stingy and they won't share any more, and that combination goes into adulthood as well. But I remember my kids when they were at their youngest, they were more willing to share with me, especially if it was something sweet, like an ice cream cone or a cookie. But soon enough, they began to say, "uh-uh. No way. I'm not sharing my ice cream cone or my cookie with you." I'm sure it had nothing to do with the size of the bites that I was taking out of their cone or their cookie.

But where do kids learn this behavior? It seems like it came out of nowhere, this stinginess, this unwillingness to share was dormant, but then somehow becomes active.

So which is it? Do we have this innate desire to share, this innate sense that we're supposed to share? Or do we have some dormant desire to keep it all to ourselves? In reality it's probably a bit of both. As United Methodists, and as we looked over in Bible study this past week in Genesis chapter 1, we believe we are all made in the image of God. No matter who we are, where we've been, what we've done, what we look like. In fact, when someone said being made in the image of God means we *look* like God, I said, "well, take a look around. God looks pretty funny then, doesn't He?"

But we are all made in God's image. We're created as God's image. And that means that we're created as God's ambassadors. As God's representatives here on earth as it is in heaven. And so as such, God created us with the innate tendency to share, as God is a very sharing and giving God. But yet then we go full circle back to that first sermon of the series, that as United Methodists we also fully believe in Romans 3:23, that all of us have sinned and fall short of God's glory. We fall short of being God's ambassadors and representatives, every day, 24/7.

And so we try to look perfect, but in reality, we're not. So we're created in God's image, but we're also born as descendants of Adam and Eve, who screwed it all up to begin with. And so we are born, also, with this natural propensity to sin. Charles Wesley,

John's brother, called it the "bent to sinning." And I know this all too well in my personal life when it comes to sharing.

One night in seminary – I think I might have shared this story before with you, but if you've heard it before, just smile and act like you haven't heard it. This is the second year we're together, we're getting to that point in my sermon illustrations, all right? Sorry.

I went to the seminary in Washington, D.C. Lots of homeless folks in Washington, D.C. Wesley Theological Seminary is where I went. There is a McDonald's nearby that was perfect to pull an all-nighter in this McDonald's. They stayed open 24/7, they started serving breakfast after midnight (of course, now they serve breakfast all the time). It was the perfect place because they would keep the AC on to frigid, to like sub-arctic levels of cold, even in the wintertime. And the purpose for that was to keep the homeless people from congregating inside the restaurant during the night, unfortunately.

But for the purposes of a seminary student pulling an all-nighter to finish the paper that was due the next day, it was perfect. So one night I went there, late night, and I'm on my way in and, sure enough, there is a homeless guy sitting outside the restaurant and I blow right past him. Didn't even give him a nod, didn't even look at him or anything. I just blow right past him and go in. I've got to get this paper done, this great theological paper, probably about the "grace of God," right? And I blow right past the guy. And so I go in and I'm setting up, I get my food, finding my spot, pulling out my laptop and everything, and something catches my eye out in the parking lot. And it's this woman that zips in in a convertible. She gets out and she's dressed to the nines like she's going somewhere. Her heels are yea-tall and everything. I watch her as she stops and doesn't just nod to the guy, but actually talks with him. I'm like, "huh." I like to think I look like somebody that would help. This woman didn't look like – yes, I'm the preacher and I get judgey too, okay? This woman doesn't look like somebody that would help. So I watch her as she walks in and she orders and the cashier hands her two huge bags stuffed full of food. And I'm thinking, "what in the world does a petite woman like her need with two huge bags of food?" And I watch as she goes back outside and hands them both to this guy. And I thought immediately, "yeah, God, I get it. Thanks. I screwed up."

I was operating out of a scarcity mindset. A scarcity mindset is when we believe that there is not enough to share. That there is barely enough for **me** or for **us**. That there is not enough to go around. In a scarcity mindset, we focus more on what we *don't* have and what we *can't* do. How many times when we're asked to serve or we're asked to help, one of the first things we at least think to ourselves, if we don't flat-out say, is, "*Oh, but I'm too busy.*" Right? Our focus is so much on what is right in front of us. I was so focused on getting in and getting this paper done. Our focus is so much on what is

right in front of us, or *not* right in front of us – “Oh, how I wish I had that. *If* I had that, *then* I might be able to help,” – that we can’t see beyond it and we can’t see other possibilities.

Take, for instance, again, kids and their toys. How many times have we seen kids fighting over the same toy, when there are umpteen million other toys in the same room all around them, right? So finally one of them gets the bright idea to leave it alone, and maybe we coerce them to go and start playing with another toy. And then what happens? *That’s* the toy they start fighting over, right? Because it’s not about the toy. It’s about the attitude going on in their mind.

The focus in a scarcity mindset is on *us*. And it’s characterized by fear. Especially FOMO. Y’all know what FOMO is? Fear Of Missing Out. It’s especially what happens in this time and age. Sometimes you can’t get folks to commit to serving or volunteering, especially younger generations, because of the Fear Of Missing Out, FOMO. Because, well, “if I commit to that, a better offer might come along that then I’ve got to say ‘no’ to because I’ve already committed to helping out with Souper Saturday,” or whatever the case might be. “I’ve already committed and I don’t want to lose out on a better opportunity.” And so we have that fear. Again, the focus is on who? On *us*. And we have that Fear Of Missing Out.

Well, in our Scripture lesson for today, things are really bad. There is a famine going on because of a severe drought in the land, and resources were already scarce. So the prophet Elijah, who basically called on this famine, by the way, against King Ahab, and this drought, is told by God to go to Gentile country. To go to a foreign country. To go to a foreign neighboring country. And there he says, “I have directed a widow there to supply you with food.”

Widows basically had nothing to begin with in Biblical times. And so when Elijah asked her for bread, she said she didn’t have enough, even though God had told her to share. So Elijah responds. He doesn’t plead with her. He doesn’t beg, “Oh, come on!” But he simply says, “Do not be afraid. For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says. The jar of flour will not be used up, and the jug of oil will not run dry, until the day the Lord sends rain on the land.” She went away and did as Elijah had told her, so there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family, for the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah.

It’s a miracle that took place. But the miracle started when that widow shifted her mentality, her attitude, from scarcity to abundance. A mindset of abundance means that we believe that there *is* enough to share, even if evidence points to the contrary. That there is enough for me and mine and for all of us. That there *is* enough to go around. An

abundance mindset helps us focus on what we *do* have rather than what we *don't* have. It helps us focus on what we *can* do rather than what we *can't* do. It helps us have a long-range focus and to see the possibilities that exist when we let God and trust God to provide. In an abundance mindset, the focus is primarily on others and on God and not on ourselves. So, therefore, an abundance mindset is not characterized by fear, but by faith.

Sharing or not sharing, it all starts with our attitude. The thought process in our mind. Do we live in a scarcity mindset or in a mindset of abundance? In which model does God operate? God could have kept it all to Himself. God didn't have to create this world. God didn't have to create us. He could have stopped on the fifth day. And Jesus could have stayed in heaven. But instead we read in Philippians chapter 2: "Jesus, who being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to His own advantage. Rather, He made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross." And the result follows. "Therefore, God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

And this all goes back where it begins in verse 5. "In your relationships with one another," Paul says, "have the same mindset as Christ Jesus." Another translation puts it this way: "You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had," who emptied Himself, who humbled Himself.

Lately I've been reminded of a good definition of humility. **Humility is not thinking less of ourselves; it's thinking of ourselves less.** That's the attitude that Jesus had. And friends, in order to experience the abundance of God, we must give of ourselves abundantly as well. We must share, even when we don't want to or we feel like we can't.

So what are we called to share, and what prevents us? Of course, we could talk about money, right? Our finances, and giving back to God through the church and giving to others. We have a benevolence fund set up for the Patterson family, for Gary and the boys. You can always give to that at any point in time. Y'all are good, regular, faithful givers, and we give thanks for that.

But it's not just about money or possessions, but it's also being generous and sharing our time and our talents. And what prevents us from doing so? Again, we slip into scarcity. We say but we're too busy, but we've got bills to pay, but whatever, instead of focusing on faith and on God.

And speaking of faith, we're called to share our faith as well. But so often we operate in a scarcity mindset, and especially fear, when it comes to sharing our faith. Because for one thing, what are the things we don't talk about in polite company? Politics, money, and ... religion, right? And so, "what are people going to think, especially in today's climate, if they find out I'm a Christian?" But what if we invited them to come to church with us? What? You go to church? You? Really? I got to go to this church, then... They might be surprised. They might actually come with you. They might actually enjoy themselves. But what keeps us from sharing our faith is we're afraid we're going to get rejected. We're afraid we might lose a friendship. We're afraid it might get awkward, especially when they ask a question about faith that we don't know how to answer.

But always, we have to share especially of ourselves. To just simply put ourselves out there. To be open to those opportunities when God presents a window to step out of our comfort zone, to do something we never thought we'd do, but in the name of helping somebody else, of serving God.

When it comes down to it, sharing is just more fun. One of the things that we love to do when we go out to eat, even when money is tight, is to try our best to tip generously. And especially, remember what I told you before, wait staff hate to work the Sunday afternoon shift. Why? Because the Sunday after church crowd is known a lot as the stingiest, most complaining bunch of people to ever wait on in the industry. Ask anyone that has served in restaurants and they will tell you that. Right? And so when you go to Taste for lunch today or go to the Station or wherever, make sure you tip generously. But we love to do that, especially when we know it's a kid trying to put themselves through college or something like that. It's fun to be able to tip generously and to tip well.

It's fun to be able to give anonymously, to be able to give expecting nothing in return other than to see a smile on a person's face or shoulders physically lifted of a burden. The Angel Quilters are a generous bunch here at our church. We've seen their beautiful works of art. They've done over 300 quilts in just their first year of doing all this together. They give them to first responders. And they told me this past week they heard a story that the crew responded to a woman in labor out in the sticks somewhere in the county. She was in active labor and gave birth there, they cleaned the baby up and then they wrapped the baby up in one of the quilts that they made.

And then, of course, as Carolyn shared with us this morning, Catch The Habit, the Christian Outreach Program that we generously support as well. We have Souper Saturday coming up, and make sure you register for the Hog Jog as well. Trinity has historically had one of the largest teams; right now we have one of the smallest teams, so get your registrations in. 😊

Sharing is just more fun than being a Scrooge, isn't it? So in all that we do, may we indeed have the same attitude that Jesus had and shared. Thanks be to God. Amen.