

Pastor Bill Sass - Sermon for Sunday, September 6, 2020

“Building Bridges”

Russell Dalby worked on an assembly line for many years. His job was very monotonous. Work was long, sometimes boring, and often tiring. What made it all bearable was the people he worked with, day in, and day out. They became his friends. He experienced a sense of community with them.

Russell described many after-work activities that he and other co-workers participated in—pot lucks, Christmas and Thanksgiving dinners. There were times when co-workers celebrated a new birth. There were times when people were sick and in the hospital, and people at work responded. When someone experienced a tragedy in their life, everyone would pull together for them, offering help in many forms.

Russell told of his personal tragedies, and the time he was embarrassed to go back to work. When he returned to work, however, he discovered fellow employees were there for him. There was one special co-worker named Hazel, who helped him through some difficult times in his life. She encouraged him when he was ready to give up. Now, Russell has retired. He misses his co-workers a lot. He still remembers their names and birthdays. They are a very special part of his life.

The relationships we have with other people are very important, are they not? This Labor Day weekend, we might think about some people we work with, and how important they are to us. We also might give some thought to relationships we have with each other in this church. The church, at its very best, is a community of love, helping one another, building each other up, and praying for one another.

Since we do not live in a perfect world, there are strains placed on our relationships. Unfortunately, this even happens at church. Harsh words are spoken; feelings are hurt; a long-lasting relationship is threatened. It is at this point, Jesus offers us some very practical suggestions.

THE FIRST SUGGESTION IS THIS: SOMEBODY HAS TO TAKE THE FIRST STEP. Jesus said, “If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault, when the two of you are alone.” That’s good advice. Somebody has to take the first step.

There are times when we need to build bridges. There are times when we need to take the first step. There is a profound reason why this is true.

WE NEED EACH OTHER. That’s true in our families. It’s true on the job. And it’s true in the church.

One hundred and fifty-five persons were flying home from Australia on Friday, February 24, 1989. A cargo door failed, and a huge hole was ripped open in the side of the plane. Nine persons perished when pressurized air inside blew them into thin, rarefied air at 24,000 feet.

Kerry Lappan, age 31, was sitting by the fateful hole that day. After the plane was safely on the ground, Kerry described what happened. “The whole plane was falling to pieces” she said, “and I thought, “This is it!” but there was a man in front of me.” Kerry did not know the man, but in her own words, “he was—a wonderful, wonderful man. He held my hand,” she said, “and he comforted me. It was so loving, and so comforting, to have someone’s hand to hold.”

In truth, that is what the church is all about. There are times when our world is coming apart, and we need someone to hold our hand—to listen to us—to pray for us. The church fosters a sense of community among people who come from different backgrounds. Once someone enters our fellowship, it is our responsibility to

be a caring community. It's always comforting to have someone's hand to hold. We need one another. That is why we take the first step toward reconciliation. But there is one more matter to be considered.

WHEN WE EARNESTLY SEEK RECONCILIATION, JESUS IS IN OUR MIDST. That's how this passage concerning controversy in the church ends. "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

A man lived in constant fear and bitterness for twenty-eight years. He could not sleep, and would wake up at night, screaming, in a cold sweat. He had not laughed for many years. The man told his pastor what happened to him many years before that caused deep sadness to hang over him. While serving his country overseas during the Second World War, he was in charge of thirty-three men. They became tapped by enemy gunfire. With deep sorrow in his eyes, the man prayed desperately that God would get them out of that mess. It was not to be. He sent his men out two by two, only to watch them get killed. In the early morning hours, he was able to escape with six men, four who were seriously wounded. From that experience, he felt God was very far from him. His heart was filled with rage, bitterness, and guilt.

His pastor said, "Don't you know that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, can enter that old painful memory, and heal it, so that it will no longer control you?" Together, they prayed Jesus would go back those twenty-eight years, and walk through that day with him. "Please, Lord," the pastor prayed, "Draw out the hurt, and hate, and sorrow, and set him free." He asked for peaceful sleep to be one of the evidences of God's healing work.

The next week, this man had a sparkle in his eyes, and a brightness on his face. "Every night I have slept soundly, and each morning I have awakened with a hymn on my mind," he proudly exclaimed, "And I am happy...happy for the first time in twenty-eight years." He was healed through the power of prayer. My guess is that he was also healed by sharing his burden with his pastor. There is healing in prayer. There is also healing in Christian fellowship—in Christian listening, and Christian love. When we are in a proper relationship with one another, we sense that someone else is there as well. Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

We appreciate Christ's teaching that He is the vine. We draw our life from Him. We are His people. His family. That is why when there is strife or disagreement, someone must take the first step. Someone must build the bridge. We need one another. More important, we need to know that He is in our midst.

AMEN!