

“Care Giving: Loving God by Loving Others”

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Second in a Series *Loving God Many Ways*

1st John 3.11-19

October 12, 2014

This is the original message we heard: We should love each other.

Don't be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. Why did he kill him? Because he was deep in the practice of evil, while the acts of his brother were righteous. Don't be surprised, brothers and sisters, if the world hates you.

The way we know we've been transferred from death to life is that we love our brothers and sisters. Anyone who doesn't love remains in death. Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know very well that eternal life and murder don't go together.

This is how we know love: Jesus laid down his life for us. This is why we ought to live sacrificially for our brothers and sisters.

But if a person has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need, and does not care—how can the love of God remain in that person? Little children, let's not love with words or speech but with action and truth. This is the only way we'll know we're living truly, living in God's reality.

1st John 3.11-19

(based on the Common English Bible and The Message)

Let me start with a story from Gary Thomas' book, Sacred Pathways. After, I'm going to ask you this: Where is Jesus in this story?

“Gary, I need some help.”

I winced. I knew what was coming. Gordy moved his wheelchair a little closer and whispered, “I had a little accident.”

“Sure, no problem, Gord,” I answered. “Let's take care of it.”

Gordy and I attended the same university, and he was in the advanced stages of muscular dystrophy. As Gordy's condition worsened, his need for extra help increased. I had seen someone else taking care of him a week before during a bout of diarrhea. I thought to myself, “I could never do that!” I soon found out differently.

After I had been duly “initiated,” I became someone Gordy could frequently call on when his paid person wasn’t available.

I remember his feet the most. Gordy had been unable to walk for ten years. Never had I seen a foot that had atrophied. Gordy was silent. He knew I would see everything, but he said nothing.¹

So, where is Jesus in this story?

Listen to Gary’s take on it:

As I was putting his socks on him one day, I realized that Gordy was the holy one in all our efforts. He was serving me and, in some very practical ways, sacrificing the privacy of his body to do so. I was so disabled inside, afraid to let people see my faults and struggles, which were disabilities that, in some respects, could be hidden. Gordy’s outward disability became, in a real sense, my inward cure. His willingness to let another see his weakness revealed an inspiring inner strength.²

To love God, we all need to be caregivers. And, to love God, we need others to care for us.

II

We are exploring ways we can love God. Gary Thomas calls these “Spiritual Pathways.” He describes nine of them. They are listed in your Sunday News, with a tentative plan for when we’re going to look at each.

Caregivers love God by caring for others.

Traditionalists love God with our ancestors.

Activists love God by confronting injustice.

Contemplatives love God through adoration.

Ascetics love God in solitude and simplicity.

Enthusiasts love God by engaging mystery and celebration.

Intellectuals love God with their minds.

Naturalists love God outdoors.

Sensates love God by engaging their senses.³

¹ Adapted from Gary Thomas, Sacred Pathways: Discover Your Soul’s Path to God revised edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 145ff.

² Ibid, 146.

³ I’ve changed the order Thomas presents them, to fit my planned order for this series.

You'll find some of these pathways fit you best. What helps you hear God? How does God strengthen you? Lead you? Those are your pathways. I've done up a short questionnaire which can help you clarify your pathways. Copies are at the back of the sanctuary.

III

Our focus today is caregiving. How do we love God as caregivers?

Jesus unveils for us what it means to be truly, fully, deeply and richly human. Time and again, Jesus shows us this as he cares for others. He sees someone in need, and he responds to them.

The Bible has a great word for this response. They wrote the New Testament in Greek, and their word for this is *splagchnizomai*. It means, literally, to yearn with your bowels. There is nothing really pretty about that, is there? Compassion is gutsy. It is earthy. It is messy. Compassion does not keep us at a distance. It moves us up close to someone in need. When you get close, it can get messy. Because when I'm in some trouble, I am not neat and tidy. My emotions, my desperation, my anger, my chaos spill all over. You'll want to step back from me. But compassion, *splagchnizomai*, is the gift God gives us, to draw us close. When God moves us, we become more like Jesus.

Also, when we are in need, we are like Jesus. Jesus washed his disciples' feet. That was care-giving. Others washed Jesus' feet; he received care.⁴ Jesus welcomed people to him. He also received welcome, and relied on people's hospitality.

To be like Jesus, to be fully and flourishingly human, then, is to give care. Also, to receive care. It's to be strong and helping, and to be vulnerable and helped. After all, Jesus' greatest act of strength for us was going to the cross, in our place, as our representative. It was also his greatest act of weakness.

IV

God calls each of us to give care. For some, it is a primary way we love to God.

Caregivers face some particular temptations.

A dangerous promise dangles in front of us, to motivate us: "Give of yourself – your time, your money, your gifts, whatever – give of yourself, and you'll feel good." Sometimes you

⁴ The account of Jesus washing his disciples' feet is in John 13. The two occasions when others, both women, washed and anointed Jesus' feet are described in Luke 7 and John 12.

will. I'm not against feeling good. Yet when you're moved within, it doesn't always feel good, does it? To have compassion, to be a care-giver is not about feeling good, nor gaining praise, or recognition, or satisfaction. God calls us to do it, because giving care is what it means to be human. The very people whose feet Jesus washed were very soon betraying him, denying him, and deserting him. He knew they would do it. He still washed them. Let the same spirit be in you that is in Christ Jesus.

Caregivers can become hard toward those who don't care for others the ways we do. This danger lies in any of the pathways. A particular pathway is good and natural for me. I wonder why others don't get into it like I do. I grow a judging spirit toward them . . . which isn't very care-giving, is it?

We're also tempted to give of ourselves widely, while neglecting those close. We can take our partners, our families, our close friends for granted. Loving God by care-giving does not end at home, but it includes home.

We're tempted to over-extend ourselves. I received notice of a workshop in Guelph about "Compassion Fatigue." That's the cost we pay when we care for others. Focusing on them so much, we end up wiping out ourselves. (If you want to find out more about this workshop, or another called "Strengthening Your Helping Skills," let me know.)⁵

V

_____ began us with something from the 1st letter of John. It is quite blunt. If you want to know you're alive in God, look at how you are to others. Show love. Love is not about speeches, even sermons! Love is about action. Acting in love means you are truly alive.

Eugene Peterson wrote this, introducing 1st John.

The two most difficult things to get straight in life are love and God . . . The two subjects are intricately related. If we want to deal with God the right way, we have to learn to love the right way. If we want to love the right way, we have to deal with God the right way. God and love can't be separated.

. . . Jesus provides the full and true understanding of God; Jesus shows us the mature working-out of love. In Jesus, God and love are linked accurately, intricately, and indissolubly.⁶

⁵ www.cmha.ca/files/2014/09/2014-2015-Compassion-Fatigue-Workshop-FINAL.pdf
www.cmha.ca/files/2014/09/2014-2015-Helping-Skills-FINAL.pdf

⁶ Eugene H. Peterson, "Introduction to 1, 2, & 3 John," The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2002), 2222.

As we give care, we are showing love to God. As we receive care, we are helping someone show their love to God. All of us are human, so that's what God made us to do. And for some of us, this caregiving is a primary pathway we travel along, loving God.

Take a few moments, this Thanksgiving, to thank God for those whom God has blessed you to care for. And, for those whom God has blessed as they care for you.