

Ephesians 4:1-16
September 13, '09

UNBINDING YOUR HEART - #3
"JOINED AT THE HEART"

IF YOU WERE ASKED TO TAKE ONE MINUTE TO GIVE AN INTRODUCTION TO EASTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY?

IT'S PROBABLY NOT A QUESTION YOU'VE EVER CONSIDERED & CERTAINLY NOT WITH THAT KIND OF TIME RESTRICTION.

RECENTLY, I WAS AND I HAD TO GIVE IT SERIOUS THOUGHT.

WAYNE FIESTER HAS CREATED OUR NEW CHURCH WEBSITE WHICH IS, BY THE WAY, UP & RUNNING & LOOKS GREAT – "EASTMINSTERCHURCH.COM."

WAYNE WANTED TO HAVE A BRIEF, ONE MINUTE INTRODUCTORY VIDEO WELCOME FOR THE VISITORS SECTION OF THE WEBSITE.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY IF YOU WERE ASKED TO TAKE ONE MINUTE TO INTRODUCE A VISITOR TO EASTMINSTER?

HERE'S WHAT I SAID:

"HI. I'M DENNIS DAVENPORT – PASTOR OF THE EASTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN EVANSVILLE, INDIANA. I WANT TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO WELCOME YOU TO EASTMINSTER.

WHETHER YOU'RE A LIFELONG PRESBYTERIAN OR DON'T EVEN KNOW HOW TO SPELL THE WORD, I THINK YOU'LL FIND US TO BE A LOVING & CARING GROUP OF PEOPLE.

AS A CHURCH FAMILY, WE PLACE A HIGH PRIORITY ON PROGRAMS FOR OUR YOUNGER MEMBERS – CHILDREN & YOUTH.

WE ALSO EMPHASIZE MISSIONS, CHRISTIAN EDUCATION, MUSIC & SMALL GROUPS.

MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE, THOUGH, OUR FOCUS IS ON RELATIONSHIPS – OUR PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH ONE ANOTHER & OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH THOSE OUTSIDE OF OUR OWN CHURCH FAMILY.

I HOPE YOU ENJOY YOUR VISIT TO OUR WEBSITE & WE HOPE YOU'LL PAY US A VISIT IN PERSON.

MAY GOD'S RICHEST BLESSINGS BE UPON YOU."

IT'S INTERESTING, ISN'T IT, HOW SOMETHING ON WHICH YOU HAPPEN TO BE FOCUSING AT THAT GIVEN MOMENT, IS WHAT RISES TO THE SURFACE WHEN ASKED A QUESTION SUCH AS THIS.

A TRINITY OF RELATIONSHIPS – OUR PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH ONE ANOTHER & OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH THOSE OUTSIDE OF OUR CHURCH FAMILY.

THAT *DOES* HAPPEN TO BE A FOCUS OF THE “UNBINDING YOUR HEART” EXPERIENCE & YET IT ISN’T SOMETHING THAT’S NEW HERE & IT ISN’T SOMETHING THAT’S NEW IN *MY* THINKING OR IN *OUR* THINKING AS A CHURCH.

BUT ISN’T THAT REALLY WHAT LIFE IS ALWAYS ABOUT FOR US AS FOLLOWERS OF JESUS CHRIST?

LAST WEEK WE FOCUSED ON THE FIRST OF THOSE RELATIONSHIPS – OUR PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

WE EMPHASIZED THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER IN THAT RELATIONSHIP.

PRAYER ISN’T THE ONLY WAY TO HAVE A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, AND YET IT’S CLEARLY THE MOST IMPORTANT WAY.

IN WEEKS TO COME, WE’LL FOCUS OUR ATTENTION ON THE THIRD OF THOSE RELATIONSHIPS – OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THOSE OUTSIDE THE FAMILY OF FAITH.

BUT TODAY, I WANT US TO CENTER ON THE MIDDLE ONE – OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH ONE ANOTHER AS PART OF THIS CHURCH FAMILY.

THIS FOURTH CHAPTER OF EPHESIANS THAT WE’VE READ THIS MORNING IS A TREMENDOUS CHALLENGE REGARDING OUR LIFE TOGETHER AS BELIEVERS.

WHAT DO THOSE OUTSIDE THE CHURCH SEE WHEN THEY LOOK *INSIDE*?

FOR MANY, THERE IS SKEPTICISM & CYNICISM.

IT DOESN’T TAKE MUCH SEARCHING TO DISCOVER WHY.

LOOK AT THE NEWS IN JUST THE PAST COUPLE WEEKS.

HOW WOULD THIS NEWS STORY AFFECT YOU IF YOU KNEW LITTLE ABOUT THE CHURCH?

“A 44-YEAR OLD CHURCH MINISTER WAS THE SOLE PERSON RESPONSIBLE FOR THE BRIEF HIJACKING OF A MEXICAN COMMERCIAL AIRLINER.

HE TOLD AUTHORITIES HE HIJACKED THE JET BECAUSE THE DATE SEPTEMBER 9, 2009 – 9-9-9 – OR 666 UPSIDE DOWN – HELD SOME SIGNIFICANCE FOR HIM.

HE SAID THAT BECAUSE OF THAT DIVINE REFERENCE HE WANTED TO ALERT AUTHORITIES TO AN IMPENDING EARTHQUAKE IN MEXICO CITY.

'CHRIST IS COMING SOON,' HE TOLD REPORTERS AS HE WAS ESCORTED OFF THE AIRPLANE.

'HE NEVER WANTED TO HURT ANYONE,' SAID HIS WIFE. HE'S A MAN WHO WAS TRANSFORMED BY THE POWER OF GOD.'

I THINK THE LOGICAL TO QUESTION TO ASK IS, "SO WHAT KIND OF MAN WAS HE BEFORE HE DECIDED TO HIGHJACK AN AIRPLANE IN THE NAME OF GOD?"

IS IT ANY WONDER THOSE OUTSIDE OF CHRISTIANITY TAKE A JADED VIEW OF FAITH!?

AND THEN, OF COURSE, THERE WAS THE ARIZONA PASTOR WHO PREACHED A SERMON ABOUT THE PRESIDENT, SAYING "I'M NOT GOING TO PRAY FOR HIS GOOD. I'M GOING TO PRAY HE DIES AND GOES TO HELL."

JUST TO BE CERTAIN PEOPLE DIDN'T MISUNDERSTAND WHAT HE MEANT, HE LATER CLARIFIED HIS REMARKS BY SAYING, "I HOPE THAT GOD STRIKES OBAMA WITH BRAIN CANCER SO HE CAN DIE LIKE TED KENNEDY. YOU KNOW, AND I HOPE IT HAPPENS TODAY."

HE SAID HE DIDN'T HATE OBAMA FOR HIS POLITICS, BUT THAT HE HATED THE MAN HIMSELF, AND THEN CITED PASSAGES IN THE BIBLE THAT PROVE THAT "GOD HATES BARACK OBAMA, TOO."

I'M AFRAID FOR THOSE OUTSIDE THE CHURCH, THIS IS WHAT THEY SEE.

THIS IS WHAT THEY HEAR & IT'S STORIES LIKE THESE ON WHICH THEY BASE THEIR OPINION OF THE CHURCH & WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A CHRISTIAN.

AND THESE TWO EXAMPLES ARE ONLY THINGS WE'VE SEEN IN THE PAST TWO WEEKS!

FOLKS, WE HAVE OUR WORK CUT OUT FOR US IF WE'RE EVER GOING TO CONVINC THE WORLD THAT THE CHURCH HAS SOMETHING POSITIVE & POWERFUL & UPLIFTING TO SAY.

YOU CAN PROBABLY TAKE ANY 2 WEEK PERIOD & FIND VIRTUALLY THE SAME THING.

BUT, YOU KNOW, THERE'S NOT A LOT WE CAN DO ABOUT A GUY FROM BOLIVIA WHO'S INTENT ON HIJACKING AN AIRPLANE.

WE CAN'T DO MUCH ABOUT A PASTOR WHOSE WORDS & VIEWS MAKE US CRINGE.

WHAT WE CAN DO SOMETHING ABOUT IS WHAT PEOPLE FIND HERE AT EASTMINSTER IN OUR OWN LITTLE MICROCOSM OF THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY.

WHAT PAUL TELLS US IN THIS PASSAGE IS THAT WE HAVE BEEN CALLED TO LIVE LIVES THAT ARE CHARACTERIZED BY HUMILITY, GENTLENESS, PATIENCE, BEARING ONE

ANOTHER IN LOVE & MAKING AN EFFORT TO MAINTAIN THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT IN THE BOND OF PEACE.

IN EFFECT, HE CHALLENGES US TO BE “JOINED AT THE HEART.”

EVERYTHING WE DO *WITH & FOR* ONE ANOTHER IS TO BE DONE IN LOVE WITH JESUS CHRIST AS THE HEAD OF THIS BODY WE CALL THE CHURCH.

A SOURCE OF CONSTANT FRUSTRATION FOR ME HAS BEEN THE MISSPELLING OF OUR CHURCH NAME.

AS YOU MIGHT GUESS, PEOPLE HAVE A TENDENCY TO PUT AN EXTRA “T” IN OUR NAME, CALLING US “EASTMINISTER.”

I SUPPOSE THAT’S BECAUSE THE WORD “MINISTER” IS MORE COMMONLY-KNOWN THAN THE WORD “MINSTER.”

“MINSTER” IS A WORD MORE COMMONLY-USED IN GREAT BRITAIN & SPECIFICALLY SCOTLAND.

IT SIMPLY MEANS “CHURCH” & VIRTUALLY ALL “MINSTER” CHURCHES IN THIS COUNTRY ARE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES BECAUSE OF OUR ROOTS IN SCOTLAND.

IN OTHER WORDS, OUR NAME IS REALLY REDUNDANT.

IN FACT, IT’S DOUBLY REDUNDANT.

IF A MINSTER IS A CHURCH & IF ALL MINSTER CHURCHES ARE PRESBYTERIAN, WE’RE, IN EFFECT, SAYING WE’RE “EASTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.”

WE SHOULD PROBABLY JUST CALL OURSELVES “EASTMINSTER” AND LET IT GO AT THAT!

IT’S A LITTLE BIT LIKE THE ADAA FROM THE MOVIE “DODGEBALL” – “THE AMERICAN DODGEBALL ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA.”

WHILE THE MOST COMMON MISSPELLING OF OUR NAME IS WITH THE ADDITION OF THAT EXTRA “I,” THAT’S NOT THE ONLY WAY I’VE SEEN IT MISSPELLED.

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, A CASHIER AT TOYS ‘R US ASKED HOW TO SPELL THE NAME.

I TOLD HIM & WHEN HE PRINTED OUT THE RECEIPT, IT WAS OBVIOUS HE’D MISUNDERSTOOD ME, BECAUSE IT SAID “EASTMONSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.”

I HAVE ALWAYS HARBORED A SECRET FEAR THAT THAT’S THE WAY PEOPLE WOULD SEE US IF WE FAILED TO LIVE OUT THESE WORDS OF CHALLENGE FROM PAUL.

IF WE AREN'T JOINED AT THE HEART IN LOVE, PEOPLE WILL SEE US AS A MONSTER – A FRANKENSTEIN-TYPE CREATURE WREAKING HAVOC ON ONE ANOTHER & ON THE WORLD.

THERE IS A GREAT DEAL OF POWER THAT WE POSSESS WITHIN THE CHURCH.

WE HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO DO EXTRAORDINARY GOOD – OR MIND-BOGGLING HARM.

IT IS HERE THAT WE SHOULD FIND COMFORT, SAFETY, STRENGTH & ACCEPTANCE.

IT IS HERE, MORE THAN ANYWHERE ELSE, THAT WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO OPEN OUR LIVES TO ONE ANOTHER.

IT IS HERE THAT WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO FIND SUPPORT IN OUR DEEPEST STRUGGLES IN LIFE, KNOWING THAT, BEING JOINED AT THE HEART WITH OUR FELLOW BELIEVERS, THERE IS NOTHING WE CAN'T ENDURE TOGETHER.

IN A PEANUTS CARTOON, LUCY DEMANDED THAT LINUS CHANGE TV CHANNELS, THREATENING HIM WITH HER FIST IF HE DIDN'T.

“WHAT MAKES YOU THINK YOU CAN WALK RIGHT IN HERE AND TAKE OVER?” ASKS LINUS.

“THESE FIVE FINGERS,” SAYS LUCY.

“INDIVIDUALLY THEY'RE NOTHING BUT WHEN I CURL THEM TOGETHER LIKE THIS INTO A SINGLE UNIT, THEY FORM A WEAPON THAT IS TERRIBLE TO BEHOLD.”

“WHICH CHANNEL DO YOU WANT?” ASKS LINUS.

THEN, TURNING AWAY, HE LOOKS AT HIS FINGERS AND SAYS, *“WHY CAN'T YOU GUYS GET ORGANIZED LIKE THAT?”*

THERE ARE THOSE WHO FIND IT EASIER TO GET ORGANIZED FOR LOATHING THAN LOVING.

SOME WOULD RATHER THROW A VICIOUS PUNCH THAN EXTEND A LOVING HAND.

BUT BEING JOINED AT THE HEART UNDER THE LOVING POWER OF JESUS CHRIST, THAT'S NOT WHO WE ARE.

WHEN THE WORLD LOOKS AT US THEY SHOULD BE ASTOUNDED AT THE GRACE, THE COMPASSION, THE UNSHAKABLE ACCEPTANCE, UNDERSTANDING & SENSITIVITY WE HAVE FOR ONE ANOTHER.

THEY SHOULD BE ABLE TO SEE THAT WE ACCEPT THE FACT THAT WE AREN'T PERFECT – NONE OF US.

BUT THAT DOESN'T MATTER.

WE ARE ALL FELLOW SOJOURNERS, STRUGGLING TO FOLLOW THE PATH THAT JESUS CHRIST HAS SET BEFORE US.

THERE'S A GREAT STORY ABOUT THE LEGENDARY ENTERTAINER, JIMMY DURANTE THAT YOU'VE NO DOUBT HEARD TOLD WITH A FEW VARIATIONS BUT THE ESSENCE OF THE STORY IS TRUE.

HE WAS ASKED TO BE PART OF A SHOW FOR WORLD WAR II VETERANS.

HE TOLD THE ORGANIZERS THAT HIS SCHEDULE WAS VERY BUSY & HE COULD AFFORD ONLY A FEW MINUTES, BUT IF THEY WOULDN'T MIND HIS DOING ONE SHORT MONOLOGUE AND IMMEDIATELY LEAVING FOR HIS NEXT EVENT, HE WOULD COME.

THE SHOW'S DIRECTOR HAPPILY AGREED TO THIS.

BUT WHEN JIMMY GOT ON STAGE, SOMETHING INTERESTING HAPPENED.

HE WENT THROUGH THE SHORT MONOLOGUE & THEN STAYED.

THE APPLAUSE GREW LOUDER & LOUDER & HE KEPT STAYING.

PRETTY SOON, HE'D BEEN ON STAGE 15, 20 & THEN 30 MINUTES.

HE FINALLY TOOK A LAST BOW & LEFT THE STAGE.

BACKSTAGE SOMEONE STOPPED HIM & SAID, *I THOUGHT YOU HAD TO LEAVE QUICKLY. WHAT HAPPENED?"*

JIMMY ANSWERED, *"I DID HAVE TO GO, BUT I CAN SHOW YOU THE REASON I STAYED. YOU CAN SEE FOR YOURSELF IF YOU'LL LOOK DOWN THERE IN THE AUDIENCE."*

IN THE FRONT ROW WERE TWO MEN, EACH OF WHOM HAD LOST AN ARM IN THE WAR.

ONE HAD LOST HIS RIGHT ARM AND THE OTHER HAD LOST HIS LEFT.

TOGETHER, THEY WERE ABLE TO CLAP, AND THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT THEY WERE DOING, LOUDLY & CHEERFULLY.

WE'RE ALL LIKE THOSE TWO MEN – WOUNDED, INJURED IN SOME FORM OR FASHION.

WE AREN'T EVERYTHING WE COULD BE.

TOGETHER, THOUGH, WHEN WE ALLOW OURSELVES TO BE JOINED AT THE HEART, WE OVERCOME ONE ANOTHER'S WEAKNESS & WE FIND GREAT JOY, SATISFACTION & FULFILLMENT IN WHAT WE CAN ACCOMPLISH TOGETHER.

THIS IS WHAT IT MEANS TO BE THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST: COMBINING OUR STRENGTHS TO ACCOMPLISH THE SAME PURPOSE AND WHEN WE DO, ESPECIALLY IN THE FACE OF SUFFERING, THE WORLD NOTICES – JUST LIKE JIMMY DURANTE NOTICED.

**THERE IS NO GREATER JOY IN ALL THE WORLD THAN THAT WHICH WE CAN FIND
HERE IN THE MIDST OF A FELLOWSHIP OF BELIEVERS WHO LOVE ONE ANOTHER, ENCOURAGE
ONE ANOTHER & SUPPORT ONE ANOTHER IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST.**

**WHAT A POWERFUL TESTIMONY TO THE WORLD OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE PART OF
THE CHURCH – THE LIVING, BREATHING BODY OF CHRIST IN THE WORLD TODAY – UNBINDING
OUR HEARTS BY BEING JOINED AT THE HEART.**

AND THIS, MY FRIENDS, IS THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL.

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