

Denice K. Leslie
September 10, 2006
Psalm 16
Matthew 7: 21- 28

“Show and Tell”

At Memorial United Methodist Church we show and tell Jesus’ Love Everywhere.

Read it aloud with me beginning with our purpose:

We show and tell Jesus’ love everywhere. We remember Christ’s teachings by:

- Being a nurturing, supportive community.
- Proclaiming the Good News of God’s love.
- Serving the needy.
- Receiving God’s grace and forgiveness.

We show and tell about God’s love and acceptance by:

- Honoring God’s gifts of reason and experience
- Respecting scripture and traditions of the Church
- Seeking God’s guidance by discovering and using our gifts for ministry
- Loving and respecting all people as each is made in God’s image.

This is our foundation here at Memorial. This statement embodies what we believe is important for us to do as followers of Jesus. But how do we turn this foundation document into something more than a nice essay on a piece of paper? How do we integrate it into our life as a church community and into our lives as individuals?

First we need motivation. We need to recognize the importance of a strong foundation. I mean anyone can come to worship on Sunday, participate in social and fellowship groups, give regularly, take on some volunteer tasks—and consider ourselves Christians. But is this the strong foundation Jesus is talking about? Can we rely on this foundation when the storms of life are raging?

Or is this more like the person who built a house on the sand—so that when the storms of life come our faith succumbs to the forces around us and collapses and we with it. Of course, it’s usually God who gets the blame.....but then again, that’s usually another sign of the flimsiness of our faith house.

Now don’t get me wrong here: I’m not saying its wrong to question God or have doubts or be angry with God—the actual case is that most often folks who have a strong faith house have a strong enough

relationship with God to go ahead and question, doubt and be angry because they are secure enough in their faith to know God can handle whatever we dish out—and they know enough about God to know God isn’t responsible for their hurts, failures or disappointments in life. Their faith house is strong BECAUSE of their close, daily relationship with God. Most folks who blame God haven’t spent too much time talking to God and are quick to conclude it’s useless to do so once they experience some grief in life.

And I’m not saying: if you had enough faith you wouldn’t doubt, suffer, or fail. It’s not about having enough faith—it’s about making space for faith activity in your life—like gardening. You’ve got to prepare the ground, plant the seeds, water, pull the weeds—in short you have to spend time gardening and not just fantasizing over the seed catalogues.

Unfortunately, its more often the fact that we never examine what we believe, what it means to be in relationship with God, or know for a fact what that looks like lived out in real life as REAL FOLLOWERS of Jesus. People, it takes work. Like gardening. Or home improvement project

Have you ever poured a foundation for a house? It can take quite a while. You have to clear the area of vegetation, move earth to level the ground, frame in the support structures—add rebar for support and strength, set in the infrastructure for any utilities that aren’t in walls or attic, and if its going to be a slab foundation, the cement has to be poured in layers and of course, it has to “cure.”

Attention has to be given to how many stories the house will be—the more levels the stronger the foundation needed. It can take longer to pour the foundation than it takes to frame the exterior walls of the house.

In today’s gospel lesson Jesus speaks to us about the importance of building our faith on a strong foundation.

He says, “Everyone ...who hears these words of mind and acts on them will be like a wise person who built a house on rock.”

How do we build our house of faith on a strong foundation?

Jesus says we build a rock solid foundation by being doers of his word and not hearers only.

It’s important to hear—its important to listen, to study, to worship, but going to seminars on home renovation and repair at Lowe’s or Home Depot and learning all about how to do projects but never doing

them—that doesn’t get the job done, does it? That’s only about a quarter of what it’s all about.

It’s the same way with our faith.

Doing God’s word means finding ways to do the gospel in all the circumstances of life from the hum drum to the times of relentless stress or high crisis.

It means acting in faithful ways in spite of fear, sorrow, ill-health, lack of resources and trusting our house will stay standing because our foundation is Christ.

Today is the 5th Anniversary of 9/11. How easy it was for us all to be swept up in emotions of terror, grief, fear, and suspicion. Middle-eastern neighbors became suspect. Some paid with their lives because of our misplaced fear and anger.

The fear is justified, no doubt about that, but we do not have to let it incapacitate us or wash away our ability to stand up for God’s ways or blind us to options other than retaliation. After all, what is a strong faith foundation good for if it isn’t used to build the reign of God in this world? Why are we disciples if our faith is only about a one-way street?

In the September issue of *The Interpreter*, our United Methodist magazine, there is an article about two women who, “in the nervous days after 9/11....one a Christian and the other a Muslim, talked for hours on the phone.

They discussed fears, faith and their shared humanity. Soon they broadened the circle of conversation. Twenty women showed up for a home gathering. Then 40 came.

The result, *Women Transcending Boundaries* (WTB), is a remarkable saga of interfaith friendship and action. Five years later, they’re still talking, showing the religious world what’s possible.

These are women who care. These are women from many different faith expressions: Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims. Monthly some 250 women hear presentations on world religions, share experiences, and identify social needs. WTB partnered with a family-run school system in rural Pakistan, contributing \$15,000 to build a school there. They have aided hurricane and tsunami victims, held international dinners, visited each others’ places of worship, contributed to literacy for refugees and raised money for women in regions traumatized by war.

“We’re a group of women committed to making changes, finding our common ground and humanity,” says Danya Wellmon, an American Muslim and one of the two women who reached out to each other in the days after the tragedy.

“After 9/11 there was ignorance and fear,” said Betsy Wiggins, the other founder of WTB, “People don’t understand people who aren’t like them. But radical terrorists don’t represent Islam, just as Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh doesn’t represent Christianity.”

When the storms of life come raging and overwhelm our lives, our faith will not fall because---it is built on the rock of Christ’s self-giving love.

When the storms of life come raging and we are hit with suffering we will have the strength of faith to redeem our suffering creatively.

When the storms of life are raging and are terrorizing, dehumanizing or exploitative we will have the strength of faith to speak and act in ways that challenge these evils through the power of God’s love.

But only if we are not just hearers of Jesus’ words but doers—only if we are willing to make space in our lives to actively incorporate the things we say we value:

- Being a nurturing supportive community: not just of one another but of those beyond our church walls who are different from us in religion, or race or economic class or in behavior.
- When we take seriously our responsibility to proclaim the Good News of God’s love not just to each other but to all “others”
- When we know enough about the reality of others lives in this world to accept our own culpability for their plight simply by the fact that we live in relative luxury at their expense---but can ask for and receive God’s forgiveness because we are about the business of making things better—
- When we can honor God’s gifts of reason and experience because we have applied our reason and experienced to challenge evil and to make systemic change.
- When we respect scripture and the tradition of the church not only in bible study groups or liturgical action but in the living out of the witness of the church informed by our holy text

and the history of those believers who have gone before us: such as Christians who stood up to the Nazis, who stood up to the Communists, who are standing up to the terrorists and to those they threaten by saying to both: there is another way than continued fear, war, violence and hatred.

- When we use our God given gifts to further God’s will by thinking first and foremost of what God asks of us and doing that rather than always asking God to do for us.
- When we recognize that even our enemy is our brother or sister because we are all created in the image of God.

Yes, we truly Show and Tell Jesus’ love everywhere by the way in which we embody what we say we value, when we rearrange our lives to do God’s will with and for others.

This then is how we build a strong foundation of for our faith: by living it out.

Now let us stand and sing our congregation’s song, “Showing and Telling Jesus’ Love Everywhere” to the tune of hymn # 617:

1. Clovis United Methodists,
Forgiven from above
Wherever any one exists
Show and tell Jesus’ love
Show and tell Jesus’ love

2. With Jesus seen in every face,
With justice built from love,
We’ll guard creation everyplace
And heal through Jesus’ love
And heal through Jesus’ love

3. Through faith and hope and charity
United Methodists
Will try through our integrity
To help God’s love persist
To help God’s love persist.¹
Call to Discipleship
In Memoriam: 9/11 Remembrance

Readings with images of 9-11 on screen:

After each reading of those to honor and remember, sound the tone and hold it until the reverberation dies, repeating until all are recalled:

1. The victims whose lives were tragically cut down in the towers of the World Trade Center.
2. The passengers of the planes that struck the towers, the pentagon and the valiant of the flight that ended in Pennsylvania.
3. The first responders: firefighters, police, rescue workers, emergency personnel, chaplains and good Samaritans whose lives were sacrificed in the process of saving others.
4. Those who searched for survivors, salvaged remains, and cleared the rubble and whose health was compromised in the process.
4. Those who survived, and the families and loved ones and friends of those who perished.

Sing: “When Sudden Terror Tears Apart”

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