

Southport Presbyterian Church
Rev. Jim Capps
February 2-3, 2008

Love and God's Invitation
John 5:16-21

Last Saturday evening, after a Kairos International Board Meeting in Atlanta, I drove up to Spartanburg, South Carolina to spend a few days with my daughter, Becky, who is a pastor at the Westminster Presbyterian Church. Since she was preaching at all three services the next day, Becky wanted to go over her sermon with me. Of course, it is always a special privilege to listen to her when she asks me to do so.

She was clearly passionate about what she was saying. At one point she made a certain gesture and then stopped, broke out in laughter, and said, "That was a Dad move!" Poor Kid, she found herself doing what she had seen me do from her earliest memories.

I wanted to support her, so I went to hear her speak in all three services. There were times when it seemed like I was looking in a mirror. While she has her own distinctive style and vocabulary, she was saying and doing what she had seen me do through the years.

I have a difficult time putting into words the sense of joy I felt. It is all interwoven with the love I have had for her since before she was even born and the relationship which we have built over the past 32 years.

As we continue to look together at *Experiencing God*, by Henry Blackaby, today we are looking at the subject of Unit 4, "Love and God's Invitation." As we explore that subject, let's look together at John 5:16-21.

The setting for these words is Jerusalem, not far from the Pool of Bethesda, where Jesus had healed the man who had been lame for 38 years. The problem in the eyes of the paranoid religious leaders was that Jesus had healed this man on the Sabbath when no one but God could work.

That's where we pick up the story. Please follow along with me as I read John 5:16-21.

Note that the religious leaders were using Jesus' healing on the Sabbath as an excuse to persecute him. When He responds by saying that His Father is always at work even to this day, and He was also working, they blow a gasket. Not only has he blasphemed the Sabbath, but now He was calling God, "Father," and seemingly though He was God's equal. That's when Jesus said some things that are really important to us here today.

Jesus does what He sees His Father doing.

Far from being grandiose in any fashion, Jesus knows that He can do nothing by Himself. He is completely dependent upon His Father.

His actions come out a deep understanding that He is loved by the Father. Because the Father loves Him, He shows Him all He does. He sees what God is doing and joins with Him.

When we look at Jesus' actions in the Gospels, they often come not at some appointed moment for which He had prepared. No they come, most of the time, while they are on the journey, when they are in the midst of the ordinary. Jesus sees what God is doing in a situation and then allows God to use Him to do whatever God chooses to do. In fact, they will be amazed that He will do even greater things than they have just seen.

Jesus goes on to say that just as God raises the dead and gives them life, in like manner Jesus is used by God to raise people from the dead and give them new life. Jesus will raise the widow of Nain's son and His friend, Lazarus, from the dead. But even greater, Jesus will give all who believe in Him a life after life that is eternal.

Do you see what He is saying here? Within a relationship of love, Jesus sees what God is doing and then answers God invitation to join Him.

We, too, are called to see and do what God, our Heavenly Father is doing.

At once when we see his activity in our world, like Jesus, we realize that we can't accomplish His mission by ourselves. If it is to be meaningful and lasting, it must be God working through us to accomplish His marvelous work. We can never do a God-sized task by ourselves.

We believe that God is at work in starting a middle school as a part of our Southport Presbyterian Christian School this fall. With no space, no faculty, and limited financial resources, it is a task we can't accomplish by ourselves. Yet, we believe that God is at work and is inviting us to join Him. When it is all said and done, God will be the One who receives the praise and glory.

It all begins with God's awesome love for us. We didn't first love Him. He loved us from before the time we were born. When we respond in love to Him, asking for forgiveness and accepting His gracious gift of Jesus as our Savior and Lord, we look at life through a different lens. We see what God is doing all around us and respond to His invitation to join Him. That's where the adventure begins.

Over the past couple of weeks I have read the biography of William Wilberforce. Wilberforce was a small and sickly man, born into a family with wealth and influence. Along with others his age, he lived a rather wild and carefree life. Then came what he called "the Great Change," when he accepted God's gift of Christ as his Savior and Lord. Within that new relationship, He grew in his love for the God who had first loved Him.

As He looked around, He saw vividly what most other people didn't. He saw God about to change the horrible, inhumane practice of human slavery. God invited Him to join in the effort. Even though there were seasons of discouragement and despair, Wilberforce continued to be involved in the fight for abolition. After a twenty year struggle, on February 23, 1807, Wilberforce was successful. It had been a God-sized task that only God could accomplish. Human history was changed. Praise God!

Dear friends, when we look around us and become involved in what God is doing, we see God doing the "even greater things" Jesus talked about. We have the great privilege of seeing the dead raised to new and abundant life. We are allowed to see others have the "Great Change" Wilberforce talks about in his life.

Application

We don't have to look very far to see people all around us who need to know they are loved by this Great and Gracious God. He wants all people to be in that relationship of love with Him.

Look around you, who are the people in your life whom God wants to reach through you? Think about your sphere of influence, who is God calling you to reach and bring about the Great change from death to abundant and lasting life?

Look around you; do you see the faces of needy people whom God wants to care for? Is God asking you to get involved in the work he is doing to bring healing and wholeness to all kinds of broken people?

I am told that Sylvester Stallone's most recent *Rambo* movie takes place in Burma. Someone who saw it said that it was the bloodiest movie he had ever seen. Some of our Chin brothers and sisters went to see it and they said that it accurately depicted what they had gone through in their persecution under that repressive regime.

I am so grateful that God is working in their midst and is inviting us to join them. There is a need for transportation, tutors helping with English as a second language, people to help them find jobs and people to teach them to drive. These are just some of their greatest needs. Could it be that God is inviting you to join Him and work in their midst?

Later today, it's very possible that a record number of people will watch the greatest sporting event of the year, the Super Bowl. Even though very few events come close to matching all of the hype and acclaim given to the Super Bowl, it can be a let down for those who participate in it.

After the Dallas Cowboys won the Super Bowl, Tom Landry made this observation, "The overwhelming emotion—in a few days, among the players on the Dallas Cowboy football team—was how empty the goal was. There must be something more."

In tonight's Super Bowl, Tom Brady and the New England Patriots are trying for the first 19-0 season. Brady has set the record for the most touchdown passes and has won the Most Valuable Player award. At age 30, he has already won 3 Super Bowls—an accomplishment that sets him apart as one of the best quarterbacks who has ever played the game.

In 2005, Tom Brady was interviewed by *60 Minutes*' Steve Kroft. Despite the fame and career accomplishments he has already achieved, Brady told Kroft that it felt like something was still lacking in his life:

"Why do I have three Super Bowl rings and still think there is something greater out there for me? I mean, maybe a lot of people would say, 'Hey man, this is what it is all about.' I reached my goal, my dream, my life. Me? I think, 'It's got to be more than this' I mean this isn't—this can't be—all it's cracked up to be."

Kroft pressed Brady as to what the right answer was, and Brady added:

"What's the answer? I wish I knew...I love playing football, and I love being quarterback for this team. But at the same time, I think there are a lot of other parts about me that I'm trying to find."

When we look around us, I believe there all kinds of people like Tom Brady, who are searching for something more that will somehow make them complete. I believe that God is already at work and wants to work through you and me to help them find that "something more" they are missing.

To go a step further, the greatest and most lasting joy, satisfaction, and exhilaration in this life comes when we experience God working through us to raise people from death to abundant and everlasting life.

Dear friends, God loves you and is inviting you to join Him in reaching a world which He also dearly loves.