

October 14, 2007

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MERIDIAN STREET UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Lovingkindness

Galatians 6:2

Jayne During is our guest speaker at Meridian Street this morning at the 9:00 and 10:30 am services. She is an art dealer in Indianapolis, who several years ago embraced a passion for children in an orphanage in Zimbabwe. Her humanitarian efforts have touched the lives of countless children. I hope you will consider going to the service at 10:30 am in the Sanctuary so that you can hear the wonderful message she has for us today. I decided that she would not be able to do all three services this morning and attend the Mission Breakfast so she is in the Fellowship Hall right now. May God bless us all.

Prayer

The scripture that Jayne During has chosen for this Sunday is from the Book of Galatians. It is one verse that packs a powerful punch – Galatians 6:2

“Bear one another’s burdens” Bear is an active verb- to carry, to take on as one’s own, but in the language of our faith, to bear is not just an understanding of sharing the burden with another, but doing so in the name of Jesus Christ. We reach out not because we have more, but because we are offering back. We reach out because we live in the law of Christ and that law is love. We are loved fully and completely by God and having embraced that love, allowing God’s love to live within us, our response is to share love in the name of God. Ours is an understanding of offering not only financial support, but offering our lives in service. We give, because we are loved. We give because we love in return.

One of the great journeys in my life was to an area just outside Tijuana, Mexico. When I arrived, two things struck me: first the dirt--there was dirt everywhere--and second the 100 concrete pads that were waiting for houses. In that dirt, Habitat for Humanity was building 100 homes. It was a blitz build, meaning that all 100 homes were being built in Mexico and seven homes in San Diego in one week. It was a week of sweat, frustration, dirt, wind, sleeping on the ground and doing one job over and over again trying to get it right. It was also a week of laughter, blessing, joy, friendship and lovingkindness.

I do not mean loving kindness, two words as if we love kindness or really like being kind, I mean one word, lovingkindness, a kindness that goes beyond being nice, goes beyond good intentions, goes beyond compassion. A kindness rooted in love, motivated by love, embedded in love. I experienced during that week in Mexico, lovingkindness. Those gathered had a common goal even though communication was limited by either our lack of Spanish or their lack of English. In that week, more than houses were built. Relationships were built, hope was built, and a future was built. Lovingkindness was the reality not only for

those who traveled to Mexico for the build, but also for the homeowners, the Habitat leadership, the friends and neighbors who came to assist the homeowners, the business owners who helped with the supplies, and the people in the wider community who just wanted to be a part of the excitement. A neighborhood was created in one week. One hundred homes in a place where people live in tin shacks and sweep dirt floors out onto the dirt road. Lovingkindness is one word, a verb, a powerful, life-changing verb.

My first experience with lovingkindness as a single word was in the ancient writings of Jewish mystics. In his book discussing the Kabbala, Rabbi David Cooper writes these words about lovingkindness, "The path of charity was enormously respected by the sages. The Talmud says, however, rabbis taught that lovingkindness is superior to charity....Given to the extent to which we inflict pain on one another, the world has an almost insatiable need for lovingkindness. We want to be attuned to the needs of the world around us and to the possibilities for offering a piece of ourselves. In practicing lovingkindness we raise one spark of holiness at a time."

Jayne During has come to Meridian Street to speak about the verb lovingkindness. She may not actually use the word, but it is the experience of lovingkindness that inspires her and it is the experience of lovingkindness that she challenges each one of us to reach for as individuals and as a community of faith. She raises holy sparks as she lives out her lovingkindness.

Sparks of holiness live with you and lovingkindness is the act of releasing those holy sparks into the universe.

Maria Helena was the homeowner of the house that I was working on outside Tijuana. We had a wonderful leader for our particular home. He had construction experience and he was just the person we needed to be in charge. However, on Sunday evening as people were arriving at the site, before the work for the week even started, the construction leader for Maria Helena's house stepped on a piece of rebar and was seriously injured. Suddenly the house for Maria Helena and her family was in real jeopardy.

Lovingkindness moves us past negative stereotypes, economic gulfs, language barriers, and educational differences. Lovingkindness connects hearts, dreams and energy toward a common goal, even if the goal seems unattainable. Lovingkindness breaks down barriers and builds up relationships.

Maria Helena's house went up slowly. It took three attempts to get the roof on correctly. We were building with a material designed for earthquake country. Where once cinder block construction had been used, we were using materials that were pre-cut into long walls to frame the house. The actual material was styrofoam and metal that looked like a heavy metal hanger. The challenges were many, the materials difficult to use, the skill level on our team of volunteers minimal. Maria Helena's 600 square foot dream home was becoming a nightmare.

Here is where the lovingkindness became real. On the third night of the build, we were behind. The house should have had the outer coating of stucco applied before dinner. It didn't. After dinner the house building team went back to work while it was still light. We

were discouraged knowing that Maria's house would not be completed in the week, in fact, we would be leaving a great deal of work left to be done when we went home. All of us felt the pain of failure and knew that our good intentions had not been realized. As we walked to the house we were shocked to see that eight men were already at work. The language between us was difficult, but these men were construction workers from Tijuana. They heard that at least one of the houses with Habitat was falling behind and they came after work to see what they could do. They taught us how to make the stucco mixture their way, how to apply it and then together we worked well into the night. They pulled up cars and trucks to offer light when the sun went down. They sang and laughed and as they worked. More importantly, they began the evening with a prayer in Spanish that I did not fully understand. Yet that prayer shaped the night with lovingkindness. We all worked together, single minded, spirit led, love inspired.

Jayne During has found her passion, her lovingkindness with orphans in Africa. The situation for children in Africa is chilling right now. The toll from HIV/AIDS on the continent of Africa is staggering. Lovingkindness for Jayne During is a verb. She is living it as she is in ministry with these children.

However, you need not go to far off places to live out lovingkindness. The beauty of the teaching of the Kabbala is this, "Our acts of lovingkindness not only matter, they are the medium through which we can bring the world together in a new era of human relationship. We can perform these acts from morning to night throughout the week. We can set lovingkindness in our souls as a lifelong practice that will always call to us. The path of lovingkindness leads directly to the highest realms. This path is illuminated by untold billions of (holy) sparks that are continuously being released...while all along, each day of this process, we constantly widen the expanse of our hearts and those around us."

Not sure where to begin? Not sure that lovingkindness will actually change the world? Bear one another's burdens and fulfill the law of Christ. That law is love and I believe the deepest expression of love - lovingkindness.

Live out your faith close to home -

Roberts Park

Neighbor to Neighbor

Tutoring in a local school

IHN

Habitat for Humanity

Feeding program at North UMC

Sitting with the pumpkins out on Illinois Street for the next few weeks to support mission projects within the church

Live out your faith at a distance -

d'Iberville, Mississippi trip

Next trip to the Four Corners area

Go with our Youth this summer

Travel with the Conference Volunteers in Mission

Live out your faith across the globe -

Missions in Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe through Operation Classroom

Following up on the continuing needs for the children in Malawi - I understand that \$2,000.00 would be enough to build a home for a teacher there. The government supplies the teacher once housing is provided.

Participate in the initiative of the Bishops of the United Methodist Church to purchase nets to fight the spread of malaria, to combat HIV/AIDS in Africa, and to prevent the spread of tuberculosis.

Ultimately, our faith invites us to do more than talk about the nouns of our religious practice, but to put our faith into action. Though it may not be grammatically correct to use faith as a verb, or lovingkindness as a verb, it is certainly theologically correct to live out our gratitude for God's love and grace as we become love and grace for others in the name of Jesus Christ.

On the last night before we left the blitz build in Tijuana, Mexico, the homeowners walked down a hillside toward the newly built neighborhood carrying candles. It was a beautiful sight. Maria Helena walked to her new home carrying a candle that she placed in the front window of her home. She brought a friend with her to translate into English her appreciation to the team that had worked on her house. She told us that we were always welcome to return to her home. That she would be honored to have us come back and that we would always be able to find her house because it would be the one with a candle in the window.

It is in response to God's great love for you that lovingkindness is even a possibility. It is in offering our lives in service that we begin to shape a life of meaning and purpose. Bearing one another's burdens becomes more blessing than burden as we become committed to the welfare of others.

Reinhold Niebuhr - "Nothing worth doing is completed in our lifetime, therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we are saved by love."

Lovingkindness is one word, a verb, the very action of love rooted in our faith. Bear one another's burdens and find embedded nothing but blessing.