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Scripture: Matthew 25: 31-46 NRSV

Sermon Title: Mission to those on the Margins

Introduction:

Our passage of Scripture today is very convicting and challenging. It reminds me of one aspect of Jesus' ministry that makes him so inviting.

Jesus has a special heart for people on the margins. He has such a special heart for these folks, that he chooses to identify with them.

My spiritual journey to becoming a person that cares deeply for Christ's mission to vulnerable people on the margins started from my youth and continued through my young adult hood.

- Seeing Grandpa give out food during the winter in Akron Ohio
- Participating on Mission Trips in High School and Key Club St. Vincent Depaul Shelter.
- College Conferences and the story of En Christo. Central America.
- At Fuller Seminary where we had a School of Intercultural Studies.

During Seminary, I became familiar with a movement that was taking root in many churches. It was called the missional church movement.

Grew partly out of a book by Darrel Guder, who happened to be at Whitworth College when I was a student there.

Darrell Guder

The term “missional” is an attempt to move the discussion beyond too-narrow definitions of mission as merely one among the various programs of the church, and to find ways to think about the church’s calling and practice today in light of the fact of the multicultural global church, what Archbishop Temple famously called “the great new fact of our time.”

To describe the church as “missional” is to make a basic theological claim, to articulate a widely held but also widely ignored consensus regarding the fundamental purpose of the Christian church. Rather than seeing mission as, at best, one of the necessary prongs of the

church's calling, and at worst as a misguided adventure, it must be seen as the fundamental, the essential, the centering understanding of the church's purpose and action. (Darrel Guder, Missional Church- 1998)

My question for us this morning is do you agree with this idea. Is the central purpose of our church to be missional in nature.

What might this mean?

According to our passage of Scripture today, Jesus can show us what it means to be missional. He would suggest that we care for people on the margins. He gives us some examples...

When you see someone who is hungry, feed them.

When you encounter a stranger, be welcoming to them.

If someone is without proper clothing, clothe them.

When someone is in prison, visit them.

Then Jesus does something remarkable. He says when you care for people in this way, you are caring for him.

Now this part of the story is significant to me because it implies that if we wish to engage the presence of Jesus in the world, we will experience Jesus through caring for the vulnerable, those on the margins of society.

If someone asks me, Pastor Chris how can I grow most deeply in my own relationship with God. I might suggest reading the bible and learning to develop a deeper prayer life, but just as importantly I would tell someone, if you wish to grow to be a strong Christian who has a close relationship with God, then show compassion for vulnerable

people. This changes us as people in our character as much as anything we can do in this world.

It is profound to me that Jesus chooses to identify with those who experience poverty in this world. He could have been born into wealth, but he was sent to a working class family in a small town. He learned a trade and lived among regular people, who did not have much resources. He was born Jewish. Although we don't know definitively what Jesus looked like, we know he was middle eastern likely with dark skin and curly black hair. He was a person of color, not a white man with a brown beard and wavy brown hair like the images we grew up on.

To me this makes Jesus more interesting not less. I think it is cool that he did not look like me. To understand Jesus, I need to have a cross cultural lens and a multi-cultural perspective.

(Story of Sari Ateek- Jesus looks Palestinian)

So Jesus identifies with the vulnerable and those on the margins. He says that as you care for one of the least of these you care for me.

I think this statement is actually Jesus sharing some irony.

The irony is that Jesus does not see those who are viewed as the least of these in society as actually the least.

Jesus sees the prisoner, the orphan, the widow, the stranger, the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the addicted, the houseless, the bullied, the forgotten ones on the margins as actually the priority. They are not the least to Jesus. No, they are special in God's eyes, they are viewed as great in the kingdom of God.

Now hears the challenge of our story.

Jesus says if we neglect the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the prisoner, the vulnerable folks who are on the margins, then we are ignoring the presence of Jesus in the world.

Jesus goes on to say that those who deny the presence of Jesus in the world will be held accountable. They will even be sent to a place designed for the devil and his angels, a place of eternal punishment.

What do we do with that message?

So at this point, I am not going to launch into a sermon about hell and damnation. I have a lot of questions about hell and not a lot of peace about this part of this passage.

What I do think this part of our passage tells us, is that God will somehow judge us as followers of Jesus by how well we care for the vulnerable. I don't think we should wallow in fear and guilt every time we fail to help a vulnerable person. We are not perfect and addressing the struggles of poverty are not easy.

But we should be convicted by this story. We should take from it that we are called to be missional people in the world. Mission is not just a program in our church. It is the heart of what we do here in Newberg

and through other mission efforts we partner with in our broader world.

Many of you are aware that our church support 5 mission partners- Bob and Gracie Ekblad- who work with immigrants in Skagit Valley, WA, Taliilee Fiqruu- who works with Frontier Fellowship and Light of Hope Ministries among Ethiopian people- builds school among muslim people, Brian and Julie O'Herin- who are translators of Scripture, Erik and Maureen York- who work with Cru- formally known as Campus Crusade for Christ, and Carolyn Kurtz- who works to provide development support for the Maji District people in Ethiopia.

I am so grateful for our mission partners and we also are blessed to support many local mission partners in town like Love Inc through our bike ministry, a Family Place, Fish, Henderson House, Habitat for Humanity, Remnant Initiatives, and Faith in Action.

You might also be happy to know that our church a couple of years ago chose to be a Matthew 25 church with the encouragement of our



Presbytery. A Matthew 25 church is a congregation within the Presbyterian Church USA that is committed to boldly and compassionately to serve people who are hungry, oppressed, imprisoned or poor.

I am glad to share on this topic with you today, because over the last few years our church has chosen to deepen our commitment to being missional, especially as we think about caring for people on the margins and showing special concern for issues of social justice. This is part of the culture of our church and one of our core values.

I think Jesus has even more in store for us as a church as we listen to the needs of our community. If you have other ideas how we can care for people on the margins let me know.

Remember as we live out Christ's mission, we are supported by a loving and compassionate God. We also do not do this as individuals alone.

We need each other to make a difference in our town and in our world.

May God continue to show us how we can serve vulnerable people in

our community in our world. May we be able to say to Jesus one day in heaven, you were hungry and I fed you, thirsty and I gave you something to drink, you were naked and I clothed you, you were in prison and I visited you, you were a stranger and I welcomed you in.

Let us pray...