

“Wide Open Hearts”
Sermon for Sunday, June 23, 2018

In our scripture lesson this morning, Paul is challenging the church in ancient Corinth and us to think about what difference Christ makes in our lives. Do our lives faithfully reflect the Jesus in whom we say we believe?

SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 and 6:11-13

Open wide your hearts! If we are truly followers of Jesus Christ, if we truly embrace what Christ has done for us—

loved us enough to die for us,
loved us enough to forgive us,

then we are to be changed,

we are to be his ambassadors in the world,

we are to open wide our hearts to all.

How are we doing? How are you doing? How am I doing?

Last weekend I had the privilege of being a part of the youth as they headed up to Howell, Michigan, to visit and participate in activities at the Heifer Global Village on a Friday and Saturday. My main intent was to get to know some of our youth better—and I am here to report that they are really terrific young people! What I did not anticipate was the way in which I was confronted and challenged. The centerpiece to this weekend experience is the group being divided into smaller groups and assigned to “live” in different countries. [Insert rotating Global Village pics] Our group of 13 was divided--3 in Appalachia, 4 in Thailand, 6 in the Slum. Each group received supplies to take to their village, but what we didn’t realize at first was that not everyone received the same amount. The largest group (Slum) had the least resources to get them through Friday afternoon and dinner. I was in that group... with only 3 cups of uncooked rice to feed six people! No water! Not much of anything.

While I knew this was a role-playing exercise, it was amazing how the experience took on a reality for all of us. The group that had the most resources (Appalachia) came to realize that the two other groups did not have as much as they did—milk, vegetables, eggs, etc. The Thailand group didn’t think they had much and yet realized that they had more than they thought. They had all the drinking water and the oil with which to cook. As part of the Slum, we experienced wondering if we would have anything to eat... the embarrassment of having to beg for water and a potato or carrot... the humiliation of being offered someone else’s “leftovers”. As the afternoon wore on, all the groups began sharing information, coming to understand one another’s situation better and sharing resources.

Opening our hearts wide begins with not being afraid, and opening our hearts wide to build relationships with others.

[video: Tyler Merritt Project "Before you call the cops...]

Open wide your hearts...

Over the last couple of weeks we have been bombarded with images of refugees at our southern borders, of political wrangling on Capitol Hill that seems to be driven more by political one-ups-manship than true compassion, by the use of scripture that lacked a broader understanding of God's call to open wide our hearts...

Our church continues in the throes of an escalating struggle over the future of the church and the rhetoric is escalating along with it...

And we can be left to ask:

"How are we to respond in a way that is faithful to our Lord and Savior?"

We are to open wide our hearts.

Faith does not provide always easy answers...

helping so many in need,

dealing with the plight of the migrant,

confronting racism and prejudice,

even facing the conflict in our beloved UMC over issues of sexual orientation.

But we cannot have our arms open wide...

If fear guides our decisions and our lives instead of Jesus Christ.

If we would rather be in control, than to let God be in control.

If we fail to love others enough to build relationships so we can listen and learn.

If we are guided by political self-interest instead of loving our neighbor.

If we allow ourselves to be ego-driven rather than compassion-driven.

If we would rather be self-righteous than righteous in Christ.

If we would use scripture to further our own self-interest,

rather than to be challenged and transformed by it.

How wide open is my heart?

Jesus confronted his disciples about the way they judged other people...

and he said: "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye... First take the plank out of your own eye..."

Instead of rushing to judgment of others (and there is plenty of that going around these days!), let us first consider how we are part of the problem.

In what ways does our relationship with Jesus Christ transform us and call us to be his presence in the world around us?

In what way can I be more "Christ-like" with my words and actions?

We can be paralyzed by the magnitude of need and feel hopeless.

We cannot do everything, but we can each do something.

As I reflected on the pictures of the small child crying for her mother at the U.S. border, I began to ask whether I was listening to the cries of children in our own community?

The cries of foster kids needing homes...

The cries of children trapped in poverty and abuse...

Do we hear the cries of children as calls to action in our own lives?

We are in the midst of a Summer of Serving: 2000 Acts of Love.

This calls us to open our hearts wide...

- Expand your heart and experiences by finding ways to get to know someone else... build a relationship with the stranger who comes to the church or the person who has always been here, but you have not met.
- In July, our Outreach focus will be on children... our goal will be to raise \$3000 to purchase backpacks and clothes for Charis House... bringing in school supplies for Indian Village. We cannot do everything, but we can do something!
- Bring in your rummage... sign up to help with the rummage sale in July that raises funds for our youth and children's ministries (clipboards in the hallway).
- Be intentional about meeting and greeting children and the guest that comes to the church.
- Consider tutoring or mentoring.

Open wide your hearts.

Amen.