

"Addictions"

Ecclesiastes 2: 1-11

Mark 5: 1-13

Grove Presbyterian Church

13 September, 2009

Ecclesiastes 2: 1-11:

He feels like a dimly burning wick barely hanging on and it is getting windy outside..

Looking for purpose in life, for meaning, for something to make it worthwhile:

Looks for it in pleasure.

Looks for it in success.

Looks for it in wealth.

Looks for it in fame and popularity

But it is all an exercise in futility.

Why bother keep going, why bother keep trying?

Suicide might be the better option.

What is it all about?

Why?

How do I cope?

All the lonely people

All the empty people

Of course, it also is all about him, nothing about service or others. Which might be a tip off about why he's so empty..

So now we flip to the other side of the spectrum. From someone who has everything but feels empty and unhappy to someone who really has nothing.

We have many healing stories in the Gospel: the lame, the blind. Here is mental illness loved by Jesus.

Mark 5: 1-13

Addictions in culture show there is a hole in us.

Why can't church be more like an intergenerational support group?

Are we a place and a people that say, "here the wounded are welcome?"

We've heard disappointing stories about how disappointing

congregations can be. Places of domination and brutality even. Perhaps you can share your own horror stories. We've seen disgruntled folks come and go here. People have been disappointed here, some felt pushed out even. Doors slammed in their faces. But we are far from some of the worse stories I've heard:

Churches that bully and chew up pastors. I know of one right now where they expect the pastor to grow the church but the elders refuse to allow him to hold a new Bible study or reach out to different people. They insist on keeping what they have: a Bible study where they reinforce their own opinions. This is a church where one of the Elder got angry at a member of another nearby congregation and threw soda at her for parking in their lot. I've had it in a previous place where my head Deacon rummaged through every drawer in my house when she baby-sat for us, then she proceeded to spread rumors about me to try to get rid of me. Or churches so focused on themselves that the most important thing to them is the color of the rug or getting new members to meet the budget.

All of which gives evidence to our own religious addiction to power and certainty.

We've heard the stories and the negatives about church get plenty of street play. How easy it is to forget that we do not call people to Christianity but to Christ. And it gives easy and lazy excuses for others to stay away. The same lame kind of excuses folks offer for postponing getting a physical from their Doctor or getting your colonoscopy or mammography.

Are we a place and a people that say, "here the wounded and sick are welcome?"

Because there are plenty of them. Today's debut question comes to me by a young adult who deals with the sons and daughters of Danville in fighting their addictions. And there are plenty of them. He's on the front lines and he is convinced how all issues of health ultimately are spiritual issues.

Yet for his people church has little relevance. We are more an institution than a spiritual movement. When they bother thinking about church, church means dressing up or

being part of a club or all the stigma that goes along with the political and ideological battles waging in our society. Church means being talk at rather than a place that creates opportunity for sharing hurts.

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Yet we could be the most addicted society in the history of the world. We have everything yet we feel we have nothing. Ecclesiastes tells our story and is our indictment. Is this all there is?

What is an addiction?

"In medical terminology, an addiction is a chronic neurobiologic disorder that has genetic, psychosocial, and environmental dimensions and is characterized by the continued use of a substance despite its detrimental effects."

Dependency. Hunger. The need to fill the emptiness. Ultimately destructive.

What are the causes?

The experts offer many reasons, many models:

Genetic pre-disposition

Pleasure model

Cultural influence

Environment

Disease

Moral lapse

Just to name a few.

Addicted to what?

Nicotine

Pain-killers pills, heroin

Sex

Booze

Or take your pick: shopping, food, consumerism, cars, work, success, fame, good works, computers

It's nature's way of doing it. A vacuum will pull things into it to fill it. Is there a vacuum in your soul? Of course there is...

How to treat?

My friend suggests that high need, high maintenance folk need high maintenance and high need care - acute care.

But then there are legions, young and old, caught up in the chronic and daily struggle simply to cope. How to cope? Help me cope. He believes in the value of support groups. And there are various types of support groups. There's the self help support group run by the group itself. Some are intentional, like AA, but many can also be the support group of friends or family with whom we are able to share and listen, where we agree to be honest and guide each other. To hold each other accountable. It is a spiritual issue requiring spiritual resources.

Professionally guided support groups can insure that support groups actually lead toward recovery rather than reinforce behaviors. Or get dominated by a few persons who really don't want to change but loves an audience.

In fact this is something the ministerium is exploring something right now, using a model that has become effective in many congregations. Could this be, as we will look at next week, an opportune time for churches? The state sure has failed.

The opportunity the ministerium is looking at is called "Celebrate Recovery."

CHURCHCELEBRATE RECOVERY IS A TIME-PROVEN, SIMPLE, LIFE-CHANGING PROGRAM FOR RECOVERING FROM THE PAIN OF LIFE'S HURTS, HABITS, AND HANG-UPS. FIND HOPE FOR HEALING FROM THE PAIN AND DYSFUNCTION IN YOUR LIFE. FIND FREEDOM FROM THE DESTRUCTIVE HABITS AND ADDICTIONS THAT HOLD YOU IN THEIR GRIP. Nearly all of life's struggles arise from broken relationships. There is one key to CR's success: Relationships. We were created by God to be in relationship. The relationships and behaviors in our lives are dictated by our relationship with Jesus. We cannot have healthy relationships as long as we're living with the consequences of life's hurts, hang-ups, and habits.

We redefine church: Jesus as our group facilitator.

This is good. Trying to get the church back into the ministry of health and wholeness. Opening up and welcome

rather than saying, "these are the hoops to jump if you want to be one of us..."

Ours is not a caravan of despair  
- Rumi

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Someone complained that the second half of the book we are reading for book club, Three Cups of Tea, was repetitive. It is the more interesting part of the book. Especially when the American who is trying to build schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan is dedicating a school three days after the terrorist attack of 9-11. There he is on the front lines of the threat and there he is in epicenter of the Muslim world, and what do these Muslims do? They weep. They are angry at these false Muslims who did this terrible thing. Al Qaeda is to Islam what the KKK is to Christianity. As he's leaving to another village in the frontier, the Muslim women bless him, thank him, share their sorrow and condolences, and press into his palms freshly laid eggs. This gesture of love is their token of shared grief, these eggs. For eggs are both precious and fragile. All things are fragile.

Hatred too is an addiction.

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All the fragile ones.  
All the lonely people.  
All those crying out.  
All the trapped people.  
All the unhealthy people.  
Would that we could love well and be well loved.

"For my heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee"  
--Augustine

For we in the religious world have another word for addictions: idols. If you cannot give it up, it is your idol. It is your god.

And what is an idol than a self-created idea? The idea of love, the idea of salvation, the idea of happiness? Ideas that drive us and enslave us with their expectations.

That hole in the heart is a God shaped hole.

There is a God shaped vacuum in the heart of every man  
which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by  
God, the Creator, made known through Jesus  
-- Blaise Pascal 1623-1662

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And so Jesus arrives at the foreign shore. And there he  
meets the Gerasene demoniac. Everyone else rejected him.  
Jesus loved him. This man possessed, as unclean as unclean  
can be. A-katharizo. Living wild and savage, cut off from  
community, denied community, hopeless, chained, lurking  
among tombs, beset by night terrors. Alone, except for his  
demons.

Easier to mend are broken bones than a broken mind or  
broken heart.

No cheap religion here. No cheap sentimentalism.

It is redemption. It is cleansing. Katharizo in Greek.

What is your name? My name is Legion.

The demon is named. Cartharsis. Breakthrough.  
Cleansing. Freedom. Peace from chaos as only God can.

Thus can recovery begin and the return to others. No  
longer cut off. He again belongs.

Our job in this spiritual journey? To get beyond self-  
pity. This is our task for ourselves and for others,  
because we love both as Jesus loves both.

Our job? Stop taking our temperature and claim a worthy  
work to do.

Our job? Repentance, removing ourselves as the center of  
our world.

Our job? To name our addiction and help others name  
theirs.

Our job? Above all is to unplug the hole in our heart  
with the garbage we have stuffed into it and let God fill

it instead.

There is a candle in your heart, ready to be kindled.

There is a void in your soul, ready to be filled.

You feel it, don't you?

-- Rumi (13th Century Persian poet)