

“Crossing to the Other Side”

I remember when I was in high school there was a cheer that every school knew. One side would start it, stand up and say, “**We have spirit, yes we do, we have spirit, how ‘bout you?**” And then the other side would stand up and say the same thing. Then it would bet louder ... and faster. Each side pointing at the other side when they said, “How ‘bout you?” **Human beings are side-takers.** Not just in sports (as you choose your March madness bracket winners), but almost everywhere. That’s **who we are** and that’s **what we do**. Here at Grace there are the north side folks and the south side sitters. There are the pew folks and those who love the chairs.

There are the **Grace folks** who come every time the doors open and often when they aren’t, because they have a key. And there are those who come late and leave early. Outside these walls there are those **waiting the Mueller report** and those who **couldn’t care less**. In the United Methodist Church, there are those who liked the **One Church Plan** and those who liked the **Traditional Plan**, two of the proposals at our recent special General Conference.

We take sides. We love to keep our friends close and we like to know who is on the other side, but sometimes hold our distance. Being a **conservative** or a **progressive** is the **norm these days** and landing in the middle ... claiming a *centrist view* is rare and not really **embraced by either side**, because it is hard to tell **the dividing line** when there are too many bipartisan folks.

When you think about your life and who you consider “**us**” and who you view as “**them**” ... who are the “thems” in your life? For we Christians, maybe Muslims? For we east siders, maybe those from the west side. If you are **Republican**, then maybe the **Democrats** are “thems”.

Why does it matter? Well, **the “us” get me**. I know **how they think** and why they choose what they choose. We go to the same places and view life the same way. They **say what we are thinking**, which **validates our opinions** and makes us feel great. This has been the way people are ... forever. We do select which group we are in, except when life randomly picks for us – throws us together into a **church youth group**, or a **tragedy gives unlikely people a common experience**, or there is someone in your life that doesn’t know or see the dividing lines and **acts as a bridge** that brings all sorts of groups of people

together. **Jesus was that person.** It is ridiculous to say that he didn't see gender, or color, or status...because he did. It is just that it didn't matter. **It didn't change how he treated people.**

Back in his day there were so many divisions. **Class. Status. Economic differences. Gender value hierarchy.** And along comes Jesus and he says, forget about *us and them*. He had a whole different split... dividing line. Jesus said, I'm going to divide you into those who are perfect and those who are not perfect. The **holy over here and the sinful over there.** I didn't want to say sinful. I didn't want to use the word, sinful. I tried to use my thesaurus to put in another word for sinful – but you know what, there isn't another word that means the same thing.

Jesus comes up with a **dividing mark** that puts all of us on the same side. None of us are perfect. All of us are sinful. And then this is what Jesus does, from the other side, the other side of not perfect, the other side of sinful ... **he crosses the line.** He just walks right over to the other side, our side ... rolls up his sleeves and is **determined to see each one of us.** Last week, I asked each of you to pay attention to people. I asked you to consider who in your life you might not see because you are

overlooking them, or are

looking down on them or

avoiding them.

Did you discover anyone? Were you surprised at yourself? Did you do the homework?

Here is Jesus' truth, "**We are all on the same side, it is called humanity.**" When we go to Jubilee Center, we are with some folks who haven't known life as we have. Who may struggle in ways foreign to us. As we go over to **Christ the Carpenter** on the west side, beginning next Saturday, we are going to see and interact with folks who don't look like us. Jesus is saying, "**All of you were created in the image of God.**" Start there.

This last week, my work at the Grove took me to Saja's house, a fifth grader who was in a **car accident** and broke her **pelvis and her hip.** Her family is Syrian and her dad doesn't speak English, but he welcomed me in because he could see that I had something for the **daughter, whom he loves.** Toward the end of my visit, he wanted to talk to me through Saja. He needed help navigating the medical bills and **finding a lawyer** to help with the accident. Can you help us? Can you help us soon?

Jesus said that we are in this together. We are all **part of humanity.** When one hurts, we all hurt. I couldn't help Saja's dad, but I just kept asking folks

until I found someone who was well connected to the Mosque that so many of us went to last **Sunday**. Last Sunday, we were all one people, hundreds of diverse people gathered at the Mosque to pray. Together.

OK, so we are all **part of humanity**, all part of one big **family of God**. Get it. Got it. In Jesus' time people were taught to help their friends and punish their enemies. I hear Jesus teaching, but we still think like this. The **separation of people** was great and as Jesus wove his way through the side of sinners, he found that there was **deep hurt in the family**. There were deep, deep wounds and those that had caused the **hurt were called enemies**. There were divides in the family of God. When the Israelites moved into the promise land they drove out everyone who wasn't an Israelite. I could list those tribes, but let's just say that they all end in "ite".

When Jesus suggested that he and the disciples, after a long day of ministry on one side of the lake – go to the other side of the lake ... guess who had set up camp on the other side of the lake? Many of the tribes of "ites". At least that is what it says in our study, "**Who Is This Man?**" Who is this **rabbi, Jesus**, who wants to go where folks aren't like us? Who is this man, who heads into a dark, evil place with those who use a pig in their worship (Matthew 8:28-34)?

Jesus knew that he had **good news** and he knew that it was for everyone. I'm just not even sure that would have crossed my mind – to **go where I wasn't wanted**. There are **situations and divides** that just seem too deep. Jacob Keltner's wife and family, after he was **shot and killed** trying to **deliver a warrant**, forgiving Floyd Brown. Jacob didn't even know he had an enemy.

We are not given the option of an **enemy-free existence** (John Ortberg, page 96). Jesus' teaching about loving one's enemies was radical and new. That is an "us and them" that is so hard (impossible) to work through. Our Matthew passage today, printed in your bulletin, says, "Respond with the energies of prayer."

Forgiveness and showing love for enemies is uniquely Christian ... and it was all Jesus' idea. Let's go to the other side. Really? And do what?

You know, Jesus' disciples rowed across that lake. They **went to the other side**. They were **committed to following Jesus**. And when they arrived, they were met by 2 seriously mentally ill men. They had been **used to crowds** of people, wanting to learn and celebrating Jesus' ministry and healing. These men had been living in a tomb, alone, harming themselves and they were not well – not even their families could care for them.

Jesus didn't approach this man like the others. He helped him. He healed him, but **instead of saying, "follow me"** he said, "**Go and tell others.**" Jesus

knew there were folks on his side of that lake that needed him...that needed **saving**. Read that story. It is in Matthew chapter 8. Read it and imagine that you were the disciple rowing the boat to the other side. The side where “he” lived. The **story tells what Jesus did**, but not what the **disciples did that day**. I think they just guarded the boat. I think they were afraid of those they didn’t know or understand. That is me. I let **fear and lack of understanding** divide me from other people. I let **harsh words and hurt drive** me to avoid people. I let stories of shady Christian practices fill me with judgment.

Can we get to a place of saying, “I will not stand by and let the cycle of suffering continue! With Jesus as my model of love, I will **replace hate with an act of love**. **What cycle of hatred is a part of your life’s story?** Sides of the family not talking? Has a work incident happened, and you can’t – or won’t let it go? Have a long history of a race that treated your people badly? There are a lot of stories. Some are horrific. **Jesus marches right into them**, when we “respond with the energies of prayer”, and he begins to offer movement. Who is on the other side for you? Would you be willing to cross that line during your prayer life? Picture yourself, walking with Jesus to the other side.

This week...ask yourself **who brings out the best** in you? Thank God for them. Thank them. Then ask yourself, who brings out the worst in you? Who is on the list of “them” or “those people”? Maybe you can name one girl or one guy. I encourage you in your prayer time – or throughout the day to say, “They were created in your image God, let me see them through your eyes.” If your struggle is more serious. If the forgiveness represents a deep, deep wound. Then pray, “Heal me Lord, that I might have a story to tell of your great mercy.” The witness of forgiveness is powerful.

If I can pray alongside, as you seek to “go to the other side” this week. Just ask me. I will pray with you. Lord, heal our divide. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.