

Epiphany Sermon Series: "Is It All About Location?"

"Relocation"

Salem United Methodist Church

Leviticus 19: 1-2, 9-18; Matthew 5:38-48

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Listening to these youth talk about the child that as teams they represented this weekend is a holy moment. Did you feel it? Did you see the compassion in their faces as they told the stories? Did you hear the concern for these children in their hearts? Leviticus states that we are to be holy because God is holy. Our youth are holy people. They have compassion, concern, and love for these children that have been selected by World Vision to tell their stories.

World Vision is a Christian humanitarian organization dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities worldwide to reach their full potential by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice. Their vision is for every child to have a life in all its fullness. They work in nearly 100 countries, serving all people, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, or gender. They provide emergency assistance to children and families affected by natural disasters and civil conflict, work with communities to develop long-term solutions to alleviate poverty, and advocate for justice on behalf of the poor. Why do they do this? The answer lies in our scripture lessons. In Leviticus we see that God had a plan to feed the hungry. Each person who grew food was to not harvest around the edges of the field. This food was to remain so that those who did not have the means to grow their own food could come in and harvest the food for themselves. In other words, God is saying, don't hog all the food for one's self, but make sure everyone in your community has food. And the farmer didn't just give it to the poor, but was to allow these folk to maintain their dignity by picking the produce themselves. World Vision takes these words seriously. They do hand out food to the starving because these folk don't have the energy to feed themselves. But after their lives are more stable, World vision provides resources for the people to feed themselves.

There are six ways that world vision motivated by their faith in Jesus Christ serve alongside the poor and oppressed as a demonstration of God's unconditional love for all people. One way is to provide emergency food supplies when there's a disaster. The second way is to provide therapeutic feeding by running malnutrition centers when there's a food crisis. The third way is to help children get basic medical care. Half of all preventable child deaths are linked to hunger. In 201,119,000 kids under 5 died every day around the world. That is the amount of American children in 30 schools dying every day. At this rate, the entire elementary school population in Montgomery County would be wiped out in four and a half days. The fourth way that World Vision assists is to improve access to clean water for nutritious harvests. The fifth way is to equip families with tools, seeds, and animals so they can grow their own food. The sixth way is to teach smart farming techniques to gain a greater yield per acre. World Vision doesn't just hand out food, but teaches people how provide food for themselves.

And this story brings me to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Last week we saw how Jesus took the Hebrew Law, or what we call the Ten Commandments and renovated them. He took the words and explained them in a different way. "You have heard that it *was* said, "You must

love your neighbor and hate your enemy, But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who harass you so that you will be acting as children of your Father who is in heaven.” During the Famine we heard a story of Capac. He is the father of the Peruvian child Rosalinda. When Capac was eight years old his entire village was destroyed by a terrorist group called The Shining Path. Nowhere in his story did it once mention that he had any hatred for this evil faction or wanted to seek revenge. Even though his life was totally destroyed and he became an internally displaced person, Capac eventually returned to his home village to assist in rebuilding it. Did he choose to rebuild rather than seek revenge because he knew it would only escalate the violence? We don’t know. When we hear Jesus’ command to love your enemies we think he must have been insane. How can we love someone who opposes us, who seeks to destroy us, and who is invested in harming us? Our inner nature cries out for revenge and even seeks escalation of the violence.

During the Famine we learned how hate destroys lives. We heard how family members were killed by enemies. Children were left to fend for themselves and even died from lack of care. These were stories of real people, like us. When Jesus said, we are to love our enemies it is not a suggestion. Jesus didn’t say, “Oh, this might be a good idea. Try it sometime.” No, he commands us to love your enemies. Why? I think he knew we had the power to annihilate the whole human race. But Jesus states the reason. Because God is complete and perfect in loving every human. This is why our youth fast for thirty hours every year. Yes, it is fun to play games and have a sleep over in the youth room. It is even fun to learn about other countries, but I know that somewhere in the depths of the souls of our youth they know that God loves the Tiagos of Brazil, the Albertos in Columbia, the Rosalindas of Peru, the Estefania’s of Ecuador, and the Beatriz’s of Bolivia. And as our youth come to understand their lives, they discover that they and we are God’s children. We are all brothers and sisters. That is love that only God can make complete. Our small efforts just may change the course of these children’s lives so that they can reach their full potential and bring peace to their part of God’s great kingdom.

This concludes our Epiphany sermon series, “Is It All About Location?” Today I would say, “Yes, it is all about location.” If our hearts are set on hate, set on making the lives of our others worse, then that location is the wrong location. It is only when we recognize God’s holiness, God’s love for us that can relocate us to God’s location which will not only save the world, but even recreate it to that perfect place of love. Yes, even one person can make a difference.

Resources: *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Vol. 1*, David Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds.; <http://www.worldvision.org>

