

Sermon – “Angels”

Text – Romans 12:9-21; Matthew 16:21-28; Psalm 105

This morning I want to ask each of you to reflect on this question. Deep down what is the nature of a human being? Are we individuals who are primarily out for ourselves? Or do we care about others and desire to be in a caring relationship with them? The answer to that question determines how we interact with one another and the kind of society which we build.

If we believe that human beings are primarily individuals out for themselves; life becomes a series of competitions in which there are winners and losers. We must struggle to get our fair share and then be prepared to protect it. Relationships with others are formed based on whether they can benefit us. Those who are able to accumulate wealth and exercise control over others are admired.

If we believe that human beings are intended to exist within the context of caring relationships; we expend our time and resources searching for others who we can care for and who will care for us. We admire those who are willing to sacrifice their own comfort and even life itself for the sake of others.

The reality for myself and I suspect for many of us is that our actions and even our thoughts don't fit neatly into either category. There are times when my thoughts and actions are centered on myself. When I am honest with myself I must confess that rather than blooming where I am planted, I have allowed desire for something better poison my mind and create crippling depression and anger. I also find it all too easy to allow the allure of material goods to fill my home to overflowing.

There are thank God also times when I hear the God's Word speak to me and touch that part of me that is created in the very image of a loving God. In my Note from the Pastor, I speak of such a time when as part of a Volunteer in Mission Team rebuilding homes affected by Hurricane Irene I was hailed as an angel. While I would never refer to myself as an angel, if we define an angel as a messenger of God; then maybe at that moment I was an angel. For at that moment I was able to be a channel through which God's love was real for another person. It is a memorable moment but it is not the only one. I think of a person grieving the loss of her husband who found comfort and healing as I visited with her. I recall a devotional book received from a member of a church I served that said I had enabled her to regain her faith. I share these not as a means of boasting but as an example of how when we are open to the direction of the Holy Spirit God can use each of us.

Despite all of the selfish and even unmistakably evil actions we see in the world; one of the strongest emotions and motivating forces that we see at work in the world is love. One of the largest sections in any bookstore is the area that deals with love. Huge amounts of money are spent each year for cards and gifts in the name of love. It is part of the very nature of who we are as human beings. There are to be sure forces at work within us though that would take us in directions contrary to the way of love, the way of those who would be followers of the way of Jesus.

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Paul in his letter to the Church in Rome provides a reminder of what it means to follow the way of Jesus. He calls us to a love that is more than an emotional response to someone we are attracted to, more than a repaying of the generosity of others, more than reaching out to those who have fallen on hard times despite all their efforts. He calls us to embrace us a love that is exercised as an expression of a lifelong commitment. We are called to express a love that seeks to have empathy for others, to rejoice in others success and to walk with them in times of sorrow. Paul isn't asking all of us to be gifted counselors but rather to be willing to be present with one another in good times and bad. One of the best gifts we can give to a shut-in is to show we care enough to be there, are willing to listen, or just be present.

Next week you will have a chance to be an angel, a messenger of God's love to the people affected by Hurricane Harvey, as we join United Methodists throughout Upper New York Annual Conference in receiving a special offering to support the work of The United Methodist Committee on Relief.

When we hear and follow the leadings of the Holy Spirit we can be transformed from ordinary human beings to messengers of God's love. I pray in the coming days that you will be attentive to the Holy Spirit, the very presence of God, as it speaks to you through a silent urging, a powerful dream, an insight revealed during the reading of Scripture, or words of a brother or sister in Christ. In the words of Avery and Marsh “The church is not a building, the church is not a steeple, the church is not a resting place, the church is a people. I am the church! You are the church! We are the church together! All who follow Jesus, all around the world! Yes, we're the church together!