

Arvada
United Methodist Church

20 June 2010 **“Something’s Missing”** by *Dave Mayeranderson*

Begin with Reading of **Luke Chapter 7:18-23**

Valerie and Rusty approached me several months ago to deliver the sermon for the week they would be away at annual conference. I was surprised and honored. I mean, how many chances does a lay person get to be "Preacher for a Day." Not many. It was kind of overwhelming. I mean, this is my big shot to impress you all. But I quickly concluded that this wasn't about me impressing anyone away, but about speaking authentically. I had lots of ideas, some good, some really good, but none that inspired and excited me. Would it come? I was confident it would. Then it did, unexpectedly, of course...

"Dad, I feel like something's missing." Announces my nine-year-old son Joel from the back of the car one day. "What do you mean, son?" "I feel like something's missing from my life. Something big. I've felt it for a long time." (Pause) Will you pray with me...

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts, be aligned with your love oh God, our strength and our freedom. Amen

Wow. Nine year's old. Two parents that love him and love each other. Never wanted for food, or clothes, or shelter, or enriching activities. Seemingly, a life without significant losses or disruptions. We say prayers together every night, asking for God's presence to sustain and protect. Yet, something's missing in a profound way. Something's not right.

I think we live in a wonderful world that is filled with beautiful things and beautiful people. Every day, I get to drive home see an amazing sight. I look across Standley Lake and see the Flatirons and Long's Peak in the background. It is breathtakingly gorgeous. It makes me feel that the world is a good and right. So much about my own life is good and right. Fabulous wife and children, meaningful work. At the same time, I recognize that all is not right with the world. Ecological disasters and profound threats to the sustainability of the planet. Economic insecurity for millions here and billions around the world. Seemingly endless wars and unresolved conflicts that create refugees and tragic permanent losses of life and limb and emotional health. Abuse, neglect, disease, isolation. How to live in such a world? Beautiful and terrible at the same time. I had a minister once that often prayed "God, we ask that you would comfort the afflicted...and afflict the comfortable." I could preach about either one of those. Comforting the afflicted.....afflicting the comfortable. Lucky you, today is about a willingness for the comfortable to be afflicted by a sense of something's missing. If you're like me, you spend a lot of time and effort working to make your life, and the lives of those you love, more comfortable. I put a lot of effort

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into making sure my family is safe, for my children to attend good schools. to have a place to live, take an occasional vacation, enjoy the company of friends and family and other good things in life. But is that it? I suspect that the reason you're here is that you know that's not it. That there's something missing if that's the extent of the formula.

M. Scott Peck in *The Road Less Traveled* said "One measure--and perhaps the best measure--of a person's greatness, is the capacity for suffering." Peck talks about whether it is possible to avoid pain and suffering, and concludes that, "The answer is no ... because there is a vacuum of competence in the world which must be filled. In a world crying out in desperate need for competence, an extraordinarily competent and loving person can no more withhold his or her competence than such a person could deny food to a hungry infant. Spiritually evolved people, by virtue of their discipline, mastery and love, are people of extraordinary competence, and in their competence they are called on to serve the world, and in their love they answer the call."

Oscar Romero, was a person that answered the call. The martyred archbishop of San Salvador is often referred to as the reluctant prophet. Prior to his appointment as archbishop, Romero was an accomplished theologian, administrator, and a committed pastor. When he was selected to succeed the retiring archbishop, he was seen as a safe choice by the ruling class of the country.

In the 1970's, civil strife in El Salvador had reached a critical juncture. Poor and disenfranchised people were feeling empowered to struggle for more than they were getting from the systems and social structures of their societies. A lot of the courage was the result of liberation theologies and a repositioning of the Catholic Church, much of which had declared a "preferential option for the poor." Many priests went to poor communities where they established what were called Basic Ecclesial Communities. They brought the bible to the people and, rather than tell them what it meant, they allowed the people to interpret it in their own context of suffering and repression. The story of God liberating the Hebrew people from the repression of Egypt had a lot of resonance. Much of El Salvador's wealth and power was consolidated in the hands of 14 families, who viewed the Basic Ecclesial Communities as Marxist, and helped arrange for a campaign of terrorism where the military and death squads assassinated, kidnapped, and tortured union organizers, strikers, and human rights activists, especially teachers, nuns and priests.

The newly appointed archbishop Romero stepped into a divided church and a society being pushed to the brink of civil war. His first significant test as Archbishop would come when death squads ambushed and killed a popular Priest and two traveling companions. Romero, who in the past had painstakingly attempted to keep the church out of politics, denounced the murders, called on

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the president for an investigation and made a controversial decision to cancel mass the following Sunday, except for one mass he would deliver at the cathedral in San Salvador. Over 100,000 people, many traveling from remote parts of the country, attended the service. A friend and eyewitness, gave his account...

"As the Mass began, I noticed that Monsenor Romero was sweating, pale and nervous. And when he began the homily, it seemed slow to me, without his usual eloquence, as if he was reluctant to go through the door of history that God was opening up for him. But after about five minutes, I felt the Holy Spirit descend upon him."

Romero proceeded to call out the assassins and declared that, "Whoever touches one of my priests, is touching me. And they will have to deal with me!"

The testimony continued "Thousands of people were applauding him, and you could see him grow stronger. It was then that he crossed the threshold. He went through the door. Because, you know, there is baptism by water, and there is baptism by blood. But there is also baptism by the people."

Under the constant threat of death, Romero spent the next 3 years denouncing the repressive terrorist actions of the Salvadoran government, pleading for international interventions, conducting his own investigations and delivering some of them personally to the Vatican. By 1980, an estimated 3,000 people a month were being killed. Several more priests and nuns had been killed as well as hundreds of catechists and church lay leaders. Some had taken to armed resistance, but for most, their greatest crime was believing that God had a better existence planned for them, that God would be with them in their struggle for dignity and liberation. For believing that something was missing. I went on a study tour of Central America in 1991. One of our visits was to a ecclesial base community in the city of San Salvador. We were speechless as one of the community members told the story of how their neighborhood was raided one night. A priest and some lay leaders were murdered. Their crime? At the time, the city garbage workers were on strike and the community felt that their Christian responsibility was to feed the families of the striking workers.

Archbishop Romero was assassinated while conducting mass. The day before, on his weekly radio program, he implored El Salvador's soldiers and policemen to "stop the repression" of the Salvadoran people. Within months of his death, El Salvador had plunged into a full-scale civil war.

Prophets are ones who remind us over and over what is missing and not right with the world. They refuse to accept the status quo. They afflict the comfortable.

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Sometimes they are a threat. Sometimes it gets them killed. What appears to universal is that they are consumed by a vision of how things ought to be. Romero and liberation theologians talked about a new society, Dr. King had a dream of a world with equal opportunity and without prejudice. Biblical prophets painted the picture of the reign or realm of God, or of God's program.

A couple weeks ago, Rusty read the passage from Luke, chapter 4, where Jesus announced the beginning of his ministry. Remember it? God's anointed one would release captives, give sight to the blind, preach good news to the poor. Jesus was quoting Isaiah Chapter 61. Today we read the account of John's disciples asking Jesus if he was the One. Jesus' response is to perform some healing miracles and then restate the scripture from Isaiah 61. Jesus announces and then affirms his ministry with the same message. This is my program.

Of course, we won't all agree about what's missing and what's not right with the world, or how to fix it. I hope that as we accept this call to be discomforted and put forth our loving competence into the world, that we remember what Jesus said, what he did, and said again. A program focused on following the way of Jesus looks like captives being set free, it enlightens and raises consciousness, it brings healing and wholeness, and it prioritizes giving the poor good news.

I serve on AUMC's Social Concerns committee and Horizons, which formulates and coordinates adult education opportunities. Very soon, you will have the opportunity to take advantage of programs that draw attention to what's missing, what's not right with our world. We will have a series that studies the biblical prophets and another one that looks at modern day prophets. Social Concerns and Horizons together are sponsoring a program called Just Faith, a "30-week adult educational and formational process, offer(ing) an opportunity for people of faith to embark upon a spiritual journey into compassion." Those that experience this program often experience a profound and meaningful transformation.

We conclude with a return to Joel's dilemma. Something's missing. I don't believe that I, or anyone, or even God can completely remove that pain for him. Nor should we. In a world such as this, we can only embrace it, move into it, let it inspire and motivate us. In doing so our compassion, our creativity, our love will be unleashed. Something beautiful and a kind of fullness will result, out of Something's Missing. Amen.