

Arvada

United Methodist Church

10 January 2010 *The Mutuality of Faith*

By Rusty Butler

On their golden wedding anniversary, a couple were kept busy all day with the celebrations and the crowds of relatives and friends who dropped in to congratulate them. So they were very grateful when, toward evening, they were able to be alone on the porch, watching the sunset and relaxing after the tiring day.

The old gentleman gazed fondly at his wife and said, “Agatha, I’m proud of you.”

“What was that you said?” asked his wife. “You know I’m hard of hearing. Say it louder!”

He repeated it, “I’m proud of you!”

“That’s all right,” she replied with a wave of her hand, “I’m tired of you too!”

Sometimes we are unaware of what goes on inside each of us underneath the surface.

It reminds me of that story about the little boy he was four years old, never said a word, his parents had taken him to speech pathologists, child psychologists, they’d done everything they could to try to figure out what was wrong. One morning, he’s sitting at the breakfast table and out he pops with, “my

pancakes don't have enough butter on them!" The mother hurries to rectify the situation and then she asks the little boy, "why haven't you talked before?" And he replies, "I never had anything to complain about before."

I tell those two stories just to get us to start thinking about an issue that I Marianne Williamson put her finger on when she said, "I believe there is a realm of thought, basically shallow thought --"Like your tie," "the blue in your eyes is quite lovely," "love the wave in your hair"-which is part of the delight of life. But she says, it is part of the twisted nature of modern life that we spend practically all our time there.

Williamson says there is another dimension of thought which seeks to see your innocence, which is much more important to me than your hair, an inner ear that seeks to hear what you're really trying to say, rather than just your words. They are the domains of the spirit and to many, that is the real world. (Life of Meaning, p. 37)

Today maybe we'll think about that dimension of life. Would you pray with me?

O God may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts draw us deeper into life. Amen.

The two people who are mentioned most frequently in the New Testament are Jesus and Paul. The gospel accounts in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John don't let us see very often what is going on inside Jesus. What we get are stories about Jesus of course. We get the healing stories, and the miracle stories, stories about what Jesus did in this situation or that situation. But about what was going on inside Jesus as the events are unfolding in his life, the Gospel writers simply do not say. And that makes sense considering they wrote their stories anywhere from 30 to 60 years after Jesus' death and resurrection. They couldn't say, because they simply didn't know.

Paul, on the other hand is another story. Paul writes his own letters. And from those letters we are given a picture into Paul's inner life.

Paul is complex, he is someone who's gone through a huge life change, first a persecutor of Christians, and then become Christianity's most well known and effective supporter. Paul is someone who is a scholar but who also is not afraid to support himself by making tents. Paul is a gifted intellectual, but knows he has a thorn in the flesh.

So we heard the first part of Paul's letter to the people who made up the church in Rome. He shares the idea that he is longing to see them so that he might share with them what he calls a "spiritual gift" in order to strengthen them, or as he corrects himself, so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

I don't know how you feel about Paul, For me, I've always had mixed feelings. It seemed to me that he focused so strongly on the meaning of the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus, but hardly said a word about the life Jesus lived. There were the household codes (written now we know by one of Paul's admirers but most likely not by Paul himself) which, in my opinion, denigrated women. There was Paul's thick writings about justification and the law and issues that seem so foreign to the day to day issues we all struggle with. So Paul, while this imminently important figure...just didn't touch me down deep. I don't know how it is with you.

But here in the opening lines of the letter to the church in Rome, he is saying that he is encouraged by the faith of the people to whom he writes. Well now, that is a whole different thing. Now it sounds like he's willing to learn and grow from them.

This willingness to let something from someone else change us, to help us, to encourage us, to strengthen us, that is not such an easy thing and when we find someone who has allowed that to happen, we turn our attention toward it because it is rare.

I suspect that is one reason why Tuesday's with Morrie, became such a popular book a few years back. Mitch Albom the writer, never expected that relationship to become what it did. And he found that dimension that Marianne Williamson was writing about.

When we find people who share with us and who we can share with it can make all the difference in the world.

Listen to what Paul says at the end of his letter...

Read Romans, Chapter 16:

When I read something like that, I am reminded of how important his contacts, his friends, were to his life of faith. There are what we call Lone Rangers in ministry... We get warnings every now and again by our District Superintendents or the Bishop or the Board of Ordained Ministry to not be that way.

I take it to heart and call my friends to go to lunch. What do you do when you search yourself and think that you are spending too much time alone?

I don't think we can emphasize the mutuality of faith enough. I remember going to a church meeting, the churches were invited to share what things were most exciting and important to them. One woman told how her youth group had grown from two people to twenty two people. I asked her a little while later how did she explain that what did she do? She said, that they had had several deaths in their community and one of the reasons that the youth had been coming to youth group was to grieve together those losses.

Sometimes we aren't even conscious of the needs we have and the reasons we turn to each other.

The Paleontologist/Theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: once wrote, "We belong to a larger reality than our own ego-self. We

belong to each other on a very deep plane, where the unity is much deeper than the differences.”

Mary Anne Evans was a writer in England in the 1800’s. She wrote under a male pen name you have probably heard of George Eliot. She wrote, “What do we live for if not to make life less difficult for each other?”

We are important to each other, more than we ever can know.

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