

Maybe I just needed to take a different road to work and needed a change of scenery! Maybe I just needed to sleep on the other side to get a different feel for things, to clean out the cobwebs and get some fresh ideas! Who knows! I have decided to set aside the prescribed weekly readings found in the Lectionary for a while and take different approach to the sermons for several weeks.

A few generations ago there was an approach to homiletics called "life-situation" preaching. It was made popular by Harry Emerson Fosdick, the great preacher of the Riverside Church in New York city, who said that every sermon ought to have for its main purpose the answering of some questions, the solving of some problem or addressing some issue or concern which is puzzling the minds of the people in the pew and disturbing the members of the congregation. With that approach in mind, I have begun a series of sermons on the theme, "Questions That People Ask!"

Last week we addressed the question of the presence and problem of evil in the world. In the next few weeks there will be questions about sin and forgiveness, keeping the faith in this crazy world, and finding meaning in life amidst the changes of life. But today the question is one which many people are asking in these days, and that is this:

What should we care about what happens clear across the world?

Why should we send money and other assistance to help people in far off lands when we have so many needs right here in our own country? In our own state? In our own city?

Why should we care about what happens across the world?

It is a question that many people are asking these days. Especially in these days, because these are hard days for many people. Budgets are tight, jobs are being lost, resources are limited, and our own safety and well-being are being threatened by dark forces near and far.

We have so many problems right here at home. Why should we be concerned about what happens to people in Ireland, or Israel, in Iran, India or Indonesia?

Why shouldn't we just take care of things right here in Columbia, Missouri?

It's a fair question. Let me see if I can provide a fair answer!

We might argue from purely selfish reasons, from reasons which seem to serve ourselves and our own interests. That is, the world has gotten so small that whatever effects people on one side of the world effects us all. With the development of

instantaneous communication and rapid transportation, people and ideas and attitudes travel across the world in almost no time at all. Whatever effects people in one part of the world effects people in other parts of the world.

Take the spread of the flu, and Mad Cow disease! Or, take the threat of terrorism! What once was a problem for those people over there, has now become our problem. If these past few years have taught nothing else, they should have taught us that we cannot seal up our borders any more. We cannot close ourselves in our own little world anymore. If for no other reason than simply protecting ourselves, we must learn that what we do as a nation, as a society, and how we treat people across the world determines what happens to us. There is no way that we can stop the treat of terrorism with orange alerts, metal detectors and guns in the cockpits of airlines. It is a battle for the hearts and minds of people across the world, and it can only be won with good will, and genuine concern to help people across the world.

Why should we care about what happens to people across the world? Because we care about what happens to ourselves!

But there are other reasons we should care about what happens to people around the world. There are other reasons why we should send money and assistance to help people across the world. The spirit of God will not allow us to seal our borders, close our city gates and shut our doors against the problems of people all around the world.

The Bible reminds us that the spirit of God is always calling someone to go to some far off land, to take the care and compassion of God.

There was Abram living in Ur, in the present day country Iraq, not too far from present day Baghdad, who hears the voice of God calling,

“Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.”

He was already an old man, he could have offered one excuse after another, but when he heard the voice calling, he packed his wife and family and struck out for parts unknown.

There was Moses living in the land of Midian tending his father-in-laws sheep. He had fled the land of Egypt running for his life; all he wanted to do was to be left alone and take care of himself and his family. But the spirit of God would not leave him alone, it kept calling,

“Moses! Moses! I have seen the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cries. I know their suffering, I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians.” “I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people out of Egypt.”

And right away Moses begins to stutter and stammer and make excuses.

“I’m not a good public speaker. I’ve never been to college or seminary. I don’t know anything about religion. I don’t even know who you are.”

But the Lord God would not leave Moses alone. The Lord kept saying, “God down to Egypt! Go down to Egypt and get my people out of slavery.” And you know what happened!

And there was Paul. Zealous Pharisee, bound and determined to stamp out the Christian church, struck by the spirit of Christ, and sent out across the Mediterranean world to all sorts of strange countries. According to the 16th chapter of Acts he was traveling through Asia working in familiar territory when his sleep was disturbed one night by a vision of a man pleading with him to “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” God was calling him to strike out on a different continent to spread the good news. And when he saw the vision he answered the call and took off for Macedonia.

The spirit of God will not allow us to seal our borders and close our eyes against the world. The scriptures remind us that the spirit of God is always calling someone to go to some far off land, to break down some barrier, to cross some gulf, to carry the message of divine care and compassion. There is no way it can be ignored or covered up.

Why should we care about what happens to people around the world? Because Jesus cared about people. According to our text for today,

“. . . Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them.”

Stop there for just a moment. Perhaps you remember a little word study we did a few years ago. The New Testament Greek word which we translate “compassion” is *splagknisomai*. Remember it? Sometimes it is translated in this verse, “he had compassion.” It can be translated, “he had sympathy for them.” Or he “was moved to pity.” It can also mean he “was moved to anger.” The word is *splagknisomai*. It’s root is the word “slag” from which we get our word “spleen,” that organ deep down in the abdomen. It means to feel something down deep inside, down in the pit of the stomach, down in the gut.

When he saw the crowds Jesus felt it right down in the gut, he was moved in the deepest part of his mortal being. He was moved to compassion. He could not stand by and

ignore their plight. He could not turn his back on them and walk away. He was compelled to do something about them.

And so are his disciples called to feel something, compelled to do something about the crowds. Compelled to do his work, to labor in his vineyard, to carry forth the power and presence of love and compassion, to cure every disease, to care for every sick, sad, sorry soul they come across.

Why should we care about what happens around the world? Because God cares about what happens around the world! And as Jesus was compelled to care, because he was moved to compassion, so are we compelled to care if we dare to be Jesus' followers!

But there is another reason we should care about what happens to people around the world! We are all related to one another!

In recent years scientists have proven by genetics that we are all related biologically. Using mitochondrial DNA, scientists have traced our lineage back to a single woman, a "genetic Eve," who lived in East Africa about 150,000 years ago, who is the mother of us all. All human beings on earth trace their genetic lineage back across time and space to that single woman. We are all literally descended from the same great grandmother.

In 7,000 generations modern humans left Africa and penetrated every corner of the globe. Some of us left Africa 30 - 40 - 50,000 years ago and went east to the Middle East, to India and the Orient. Many of us left Africa and went to Asia and Europe where the sun is not so hot and the days are colder and we lost our dark skin, and we eventually found our way to the shores of North America. And some of us left Africa only a few hundred years ago, or just last week. But when we trace our family trees back far enough we come to the same place, to Africa, to a single woman, who is the great grandmother of us all.

That's what the Bible has been trying to tell us all along. For more than 3,000 years we have been reading the story of creation in the book of Genesis, and all that time it has been right there before us. We all come from Adam and Eve. Whether we interpret it literally or metaphorically, the truth is one and the same, we are all related.

We are all brothers and sisters! Think about what that means!

What would you do if your brother was smashed up in an auto accident? Would you ignore the phone call and go back to watching the football game?

What would you do if your sister's little girl was stricken with encephalitis and taken in a coma to the hospital? Would you sit by let someone else go the hospital and sit up all

night with her by the bed?

What would you do if your cousin or your grandmother by lost her home in a fire? Would you lock your doors and stand guard over your clothes and furniture?

When the hurricanes rip through the cities of the American southeast, and terrorists guide planes in the buildings in New York, and the bombs explode in Tel Aviv; when the tanks shell the houses in the Gaza Strip, when the earth quakes in Iran, our brothers and sisters all begin to suffer.

When they suffer we all suffer. Whatever happens to one of us happens to all of us.

It was a hot July day and the zoo was packed with people. It must have been the 4th of July, for there were people everywhere looking at the bears and the chimps, and the elephants. We had been down at the pool watching the men feeding the sea lions when we finally persuaded Mom to buy us a snow cone. Dad got in the line and before too long handed out snow cones to my two sisters and brothers and I. And did it ever taste good! Just about that time someone said, "Let's go up to the snake house." And so we all set off. We got half way up the hill when Mom noticed that little brother was not with us. He wasn't holding Dad's hand and he wasn't pestering me, he was no where to be seen.

What would you do if your brother was missing? Would you just stand there looking at the snakes? Or, would you go to find him? We quickly spread out and went to find him. My brother and I ran back down the hill to the snow cone stand and there he was, standing there with cherry snow cone juice running down his hand and tears running down his cheek. And Mom showed up and threw her arms around him and would not let him go until he stopped sobbing.

There are people at our door step, across the state, and across the world, our brothers and sisters, who are lost, or sick or hungry or lonely. What do you think Christ wants us to do about them?