

Fingerprints Of Faith

I want to begin by sharing a story with you this morning about a young 7 year old boy by the name of Shaun - a kid with a really big heart.

“Ninety-seven, ninety-eight!” Shaun counted triumphantly. *“Ninety-eight dollars!”* And smiling - he dropped the bills back into the piggy bank labelled *Disney Money*. It was all the seven year-old had - and he was saving it.

“It takes a lot of money to go to Disney World,” his Mom, Marie, had told him - money that she and his Dad, Greg - just didn't have. *“If you want to go,”* she told him, *“you'll have to help us save for it.”*

And Shaun did - stashing away his weekly allowance, Christmas money, and gifts he'd received during the year. Then, one night, he saw the news.

“Oh, no!” he gasped - watching the flames lick some houses in a nearby sub-division, leaving 24 families homeless. *“Mom, can't we do something?”*

Marie shook her head sadly. What a sweetie, she thought. Then an address came on the screen, and Marie grabbed a pen.

“The Red Cross,” she told Shaun. *“Maybe we can send some clothing. They'll be needing so much.”*

Then Shaun ran off - returning minutes later with his piggy bank. *“Let's send this!”*

Marie's eyes filled with tears. She knew how long he'd been saving - and how hard he's worked for that money.

“Are you sure?” she asked. *“Once you give it away - you can't ask for it back.”*

“I won't,” he promised. *“Maybe the kids at school want to help, too.”* Marie's heart filled with pride. After getting the okay of Shaun's principal, she phoned the Red Cross - which told her how to start a collection. The next day - Shaun's Dad lugged a water jug to school with Shaun's savings inside it. ***Help***

the Fire Victims' it said - and the kids filled the jug with whatever they had. Before long, they'd raised \$400.12 - and the Red Cross came to pick it up - accompanied by reporters who wanted to meet the boy who has started it all.

Shaun says it was simple - *"If someone gets hurt - you should try to help them. It was the right thing to do."*

That story came to mind this week as I reflected on the readings from the lectionary this Sunday. Both the passage from Isaiah 58 and that from Matthew, chapter 5 - a continuation of the Sermon on the Mount, which we heard last week - speak of a faith firmly rooted in tangible, everyday actions. Both state clearly that we cannot claim to love God, if we do not show love to our neighbours. In the 'Quotes And Comments' section of a past issue of the United Church Observer, Garrison Keilor once made the comment, *"You can become a Christian by going to church just about as easily as you can become an automobile by sleeping in the garage!"* The prophet Isaiah states it in a slightly different way - but the meaning is the same. *"Fasting (ie. going to church) will not make your voice to be heard on high Is this not the fast that I choose (says the LORD) - to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the burden of the oppressed ... to share your bread with the hungry, and to bring the homeless poor into your house ..."* (Is. 58: 4,5,7) Remember the words of the prophet Micah, from whom we heard last week: *"What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God."* (Micah 6:8)

Both Micah and Isaiah maintain that our faith must be firmly rooted in tangible expressions of love - otherwise we are simply going through the motions. I heard the question posed on a radio station a couple of years ago: *"If you were charged with being a Christian - would there be enough evidence to convict you?"* A thought-provoking question, to be sure. What would **your** answer be - or mine?

Let me ask you another question. How many here like to read detective stories - or watch them on TV? And how many times have you heard Sherlock Holmes - Jessica Fletcher - or the group from CSI, Criminal Minds, NCIS or Law and Order - upon examining a room after a crime has been committed - state: *"It's a perfect crime! They didn't leave any fingerprints anywhere!"* Well - what I hear Micah and Isaiah saying to us this morning is - that it is **always** a crime when we don't leave our fingerprints of faith anywhere!

And that is essentially what Jesus is also talking about in our Gospel reading this morning - when he calls us to be salt and light to the world. He, too, is speaking of love expressed through action. The images of salt and light that he uses in our text would have been very symbolic to the people of his own day. Salt - as an important preservative and seasoning - was a valuable commodity in the First Century. I found it interesting to learn that

our word 'salary' comes from the root word for salt - because in Roman times, Caesar's soldiers received part of their pay in salt. And the expression '*not worth your salt*' meant that you hadn't earned your wages. Salt also brings out the flavour of food we eat - and adds zest. Before refrigeration, salt was used as a preservative. And - as anyone with a sore throat knows - salt also has the ability to promote healing. Salt was also used to give brightness to lamps by sprinkling it on the oil. In addition - salt has a symbolic meaning. When people made a contract or agreement - they made it over a meal with salt. This 'covenant of the salt' was a sign of friendship and honour. To be like salt, therefore - as Jesus is urging in this passage of scripture - is to play an important role in the world. It is to offer hope, healing, zest and light to life around us. It is to give words of encouragement to others - and so bring out the best in the people we encounter. It is to be sign's of God's friendship and love. It is to leave our fingerprints of faith on the world.

In that same passage from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus also said, "*You are the light of the world. No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket. So let your light so shine that others may see your good works and give glory to God in heaven.*" Again - like leaving fingerprints - our faith is something more than just a private affair - more than just coming to church on Sunday. As one person put it: "*There can be no such thing as secret discipleship. For either the secrecy destroys the discipleship - or the discipleship destroys the secrecy.*" A faith whose evidence stops at the church door is of little use to anyone. It should be seen in the way we treat a store assistance across the counter, in the way we order a meal in a restaurant, in the way we treat our employees or serve our employer, in the way we play a game or drive the car. A Christian should be just as much of a Christian in the workplace, the schoolroom, the kitchen, the golf course, and the playing field as in church. Jesus did not say, "*You are the light of the church.*" He did say, "*You are the light of the world*". And in our daily lives, there should be some evidence of that.

Our scripture readings this morning make it clear that paying lip service to our faith on Sunday morning is not enough if it is not also made real through the way we live, and what we say and do when we leave this place. There is ultimately no substitute for the power of love in action. We are called to embody the presence and love of God wherever we go - to leave our fingerprints of faith all over our living - to be salt and light to the world. May God give us grace.