

“Celebrating the Blessing of Caring Ministry”

Galatians 6:2-10; 1 Peter 5:1-4, 6-7

September 22, 2019

PRAY

What do you care? Do you even care? Why do you care so much all of a sudden? Do I look like I care? I don't care...Well, you have to care. Not caring is a cop-out! Not caring is not optional. The Apostle Paul wrote this to the Galatians: *“Carry each other's burdens and so you will fulfill the law of Christ.”*

Is that why we care because it is a Christian law? Or because in caring for each other we give and receive the love we were created for? Christ came to teach us to live into who God would have us be, so we can live in relationship with each other. The law is for us, not to make us unhappy, but to make our lives richer.

Most inventions work after many hours, days and months of experimenting to get it right, and works best when it is used in the way it was intended. I imagine God had a specific plan for us as we were created as well. But often we only follow God's plan as long as it suits our desires. Caring for each other is part of the better plan. Caring is easier when you love someone. It is about being relational with others. That is the Christian law –to love one another.

Do I get bonus points if I act like I care? Paul goes on to say: *“A person will harvest what they plant.”*

There is a parable about a man, having a near death experience. He contemplated his life of sin and anxiously awaited his fate in the next world.

An escort met him at the boundary of hereafter and with a welcoming smile says, “You're not ready yet sir; you still have another chance. But you'll return soon, so let me show you what goes on here on the other side.”

Together they enter a great hall where a long candle-lit banquet table was laden with bowls of steaming, fragrant soups, succulent roasts, perfectly cooked vegetables, aromatic loaves of bread, the finest of wines, fruits of every kind, and a dazzling array of cakes and pies.

Diners filled every chair, but shockingly, amid luxurious bounty, the scene was one of pain and anguish. Skeletal forms were twisted and moaning in starvation, with barely the strength to strike at each other with their spoons.

Looking closer, the man saw that all spoons had long handles—longer than the diners' arms; too long for the diners to feed themselves. “So this is Hell,” gasped the man. “Anger and misery, amid abundance. Where's the Devil?” “Evil resides in the hearts of men,” says the Escort, “But, come, let me show you something else.”

The two entered another great hall. And in that hall there was another long, candle-lit banquet table, covered with a similar incredible spread of delicious foods, drinks and sweets.

Here the sounds of laughter, chatter and song fill the hall while healthy and happy diners are enjoying the company and the bounty before them. They, too, had long spoons, but they were feeding each other. “And this,” the Escort told the man, “is heaven.”

Caring about another takes the focus off of yourself. There are a great plenty of people who only focus on themselves. Do you know some? Jesus came only to focus on others. He seemed to struggle a bit in the Garden of Gethsemane, as he soon faced the cross, but his major concern was for the many who had not heard God's message and even more the many who heard and didn't seem to respond.

So what are you planting in your life? When you care, you also learn how to be cared for. Children know the need to be cared for until they can care for themselves. As adults we often lose sight of the need to be cared for. We need to allow others to feed us as well as feeding others. This can be humbling, but it is part of the heavenly banquet.

Several weeks ago the teachers survived first day jitters. Will the students listen to what I have to teach? I know that the elementary students have opportunities to go into the class room and meet their teachers ahead of actual class days.

This gives the teachers opportunity to begin the care of the students before the actual teaching begins. Teddy Roosevelt said: "Children do not care how much you know, until they know how much you care."

Also in the letter to the Galatians it says: "...let's work for the good of all whenever we have an opportunity." You hear me talk a lot about opportunities. There are many...everyone needs to choose what they will care about, who they will care for.

Do you remember the game chutes and ladders? Choosing to serve an opportunity of caring is like climbing a ladder; the more you do it the greater your desire to serve others. But there are also the chutes if that is where your choice lands you, well, it's backward that you go. The difference between the game and real life is that we don't move by random dice rolls, but by our own choices.

As Hayward UMC we are Hayward United Methodist Caring. Some of us serve the people within the church family, but many of you hear the message of opportunity and caring and serve in the community, caring for others. We emphasize Caring as a ministry of this church to continually remind ourselves that we are called to that ministry.

Then we choose our direction, hopefully because we have heard the cry of those who need us and we can see beyond ourselves to help others.

Caring for each other makes us stronger to care for the world. We are the church taking Christ to the world, through Holy Communion, nursing home services, homebound visits, meals to the sick, hospital visits, rides to appointments, making and sharing prayer shawls for love & comfort and certainly not last or least is our prayers given to help care for, and heal the world.

From the gospel of John chapter 13 comes this example of caring: *"Before the Festival of Passover, Jesus knew that his time had come to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them fully.*

*Jesus and his disciples were sharing the evening meal. The devil had already provoked Judas, Simon Iscariot's son, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew the Father had given everything into his hands and that he had come from God and was returning to God.*

*So he got up from the table and took off his robes. Picking up a linen towel, he tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a washbasin and began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he was wearing. When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"*

*Jesus replied, "You don't understand what I'm doing now, but you will understand later." After he washed the disciples' feet, he put on his robes and returned to his place at the table. He said to them, "Do you know what I've done for you? You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you speak correctly, because I am.*

*If I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you too must wash each other's feet. I have given you an example: Just as I have done, you also must do. I assure you, servants aren't greater than their master, nor are those who are sent greater than the one who sent them. Since you know these things, you will be happy if you do them.*

Caring enough to take on a servant's role, Jesus did something very unexpected to teach and to show the disciples that he really cared about them. Facing the most difficult times, we are 'there' for each other, offering hope and healing for all of those afflicted by Hurricanes, tornadoes, fires and floods, or whatever fills the blank at that moment.

First Peter, is another letter of the New Testament. The author presents himself as Peter the Apostle, and was traditionally held to have been written during his time as bishop of Rome or Bishop of Antioch. The letter is addressed to various churches in Asia Minor suffering religious persecution.

Peter writes this *"Therefore, I have a request for those among you... Like shepherds, tend the flock of God among you. Watch over it."* Who might you consider your flock? In Bible Study this week we watched a video about the Shepherd and the under-shepherds, watching over the sheep.

They didn't have their hand on the sheep every moment, giving the sheep to breathe, yet they watched, led and followed at a short distance to be ready to protect them as needed. Do you care enough to be a shepherd or under-shepherd? Are you included in someone else's flock?

A couple of weeks ago, someone from here was in the hospital for 5 days and back home before I knew about it. It is a good thing when we can watch out for each other.

Other times I will get a call from a friend telling me that their friend is in the hospital. They were watching out for this one, as they were one of their flock. I need to hear from someone when there is someone in the hospital. The hospital won't call me and I might not know until the patient has gone home, wondering if the church cares at all...

The news for me, sets me into prayer mode and schedule arranging for a visit at the hospital. This seems small when I think of the person in the hospital trying to figure out what rearrangements of their life will have to be made. Often one of the most caring things we can give is our presence to listen and assurance that things will get taken care of until they are able to return to it.

The ministries of this church often overlap. Caring for the absences that take the worry away from one who is currently unable to attend to them can become 'mission ministry.' Worship comes in as we pray for God's healing, knowing that we do worship a God of caring. Faith Formation develops as different people take on new opportunities of caring and know God's presence in the process.

In fact, the ministry of fellowship could easily fit under Caring ministries. How many times in your life has food been offered as a gift of healing, from yourself or to yourself? And how many times while sitting in fellowship after worship did you share or hear a need to be cared for?

When we take the time to sit calmly enough to listen to each other, we can share each other's burdens. In addition, when you have a church at HUMC that has over 40% of its congregation worshipping single, a shared meal of Pot Luck Blessings, may relieve, at least for a short time, the loneliness that can creep into single lives.

I realize that Pot Luck meals may not be for everyone, yet they may be a great grace for others. I also know that sometimes a lot of information can be shared over meals, and some of it may taste juicy enough to re-share, but be sure you confirm facts before you share them incorrectly. Caring can hit a chute and send us back if it is not done carefully.

Peter also writes: *"Don't shepherd because you must, but do it voluntarily for God. Don't shepherd greedily, but do it eagerly. Don't shepherd by ruling over those entrusted to your care, but become examples to the flock."*

We are always an example in our lives, people see if you are climbing ladders or slipping down chutes. Don't grumble about the next generation if you haven't been the shepherd they have needed to climb the ladders...Caring is done in many ways. You just have to look around for a need and help fill the need. "Stop caring what others do. Care about what you do."

There is always more to do, at the very least, if not the most...keep praying! Know that we can do more together than we can do alone. "Do I look like someone who cares?" God hopes you do! Yet the most amazing thing is that if you care or not, God will always take care of you!

PRAY

Hymn 2222 The Servant Song