

FIRST SABBATH SERMON

A MINISTRY OF LOVE

Scripture Reading: Luke 10:30-35

During this week of Health Emphasis we will have two objectives:

1. Renew our desire to practice healthy habits.
2. Develop awareness among church members to develop ministries to aid the community.

Introduction.

When you sit in front of the television to watch the news, what is the common denominator in every program? Accidents assassinations, catastrophes, illness, etc. Yes, the answer is pain suffering and death. This is so common on the television and in the movies that we are losing sensibility to suffering.

In our world, many people suffer because of pain illnesses, divorce, and loss of a loved one, poverty or depression. Many are dying, others have lost the desire to live and sadly others have chosen to take their own lives.

This is the work of the evil one who has come to steal, kill and destroy.
However, Jesus said:" I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."
John 10:10

Today, the church must follow the example of Jesus; He visited towns and cities healing the sick and providing physical social, mental and spiritual well-being to each person offering them salvation: "complete healing"

What was the reason why Jesus healed?

On one occasion Jesus was asked: "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"
(Luke 10:25)

What must I do? What should we do to inherit eternal life? What must the church do while we await the second coming of Jesus?

Perhaps our answer could be:

Return your tithes, become a vegetarian, go to church, get involved in church activities, keep the Sabbath, the commandments and all church norms and practices, etc....

The Pharisees answer was:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and, Love your neighbor as yourself." "You have answered correctly" Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

However we will remember that the Pharisee came back to ask another question: Who is my neighbor?

Then Jesus told that marvelous parable about the Good Samaritan:

A certain individual traveled from Jerusalem to Jericho	Who is this man that was travelling? That traveler represents all human beings in this world.
He was attacked by robbers	Who were the robbers? God's enemy wants to destroy you, he wants to take all that you have. Your health, purity, your family, your children, your life...
A priest and a Levite passed by and did nothing	Whom do these religious leaders represent? They represent us, the religious, who sometimes will ignore human suffering.
However, a Samaritan came to the rescue.	In the first place he symbolizes Jesus who came to rescue humanity; but also represents the followers of Jesus who are interested in helping those who suffer.
He took the injured man to an inn.	The inn represents a church. It is the best place that God has to heal those who the enemy has hurt.
He paid the inn keeper with his own money.	We are the inn keepers who must help the injured to recuperate. And as the Good Samaritan did, we should be willing to invest our resources to alleviate human suffering.

In this parable we can observe that Jesus showed what was his mission and the mission of the church while waiting for His second return. He also showed that **it is love that moves us to help those who are suffering and in need.** Therefore

if our church is deprived of love, very few ministries to help the community will develop. However, when love is the center of the life of a church, many ministries to aid the community will develop.

On a certain day two Pastors went to visit a family. They wanted to register their names as candidates for baptism to be held on the upcoming Sabbath. This would end the evangelistic series that they had been conducting. Suddenly they realized that it was almost time for the evening meeting so they hurried back to the church. The way back to the church was on a dirt road that ran alongside a deep channel. As they proceeded on the road, a huge cloud of dust built up behind their vehicle. Suddenly by the roadside they saw a few cars that had stopped and they were able to see a woman who was kneeling over and crying. The pastor slowed down but did not stop. They caught a glimpse of an overturned car with its four wheels above the surface of the water.

The newspaper headlines of the following day read: "Four persons drowned in a vehicle that fell into the channel."

What should the pastors have done when they became aware of the accident? They could have argued that they did not know how to swim. Or, that already there were many people trying to rescue the children from the vehicle. Or perhaps that they had urgency to get to the church because there were a lot of people attending the service who wanted to hear their preaching. In reality, no! None of these excuses are valid... There on the roadside was a suffering woman who was crying for her family trapped in a car and probably would drown. What hindered them from stopping and providing some support to a persona in pain? All that is needed is compassion for human suffering.

How frequent it is that as a church we are so occupied with all the activities and yet we pass by people who are suffering from illnesses, accidents, drug addictions, loss of loved ones, separation and divorce, depression suicide, etc., and the church does nothing.

Let me give some recommendations that may help our churches to fulfill their mission in this world of ours.

- A. Let God's love be the center of your religion.**
- B. Love all those who surround you**
- C. Be a relevant church for the world of today.**

Our church must be a beacon in the community. It should move out of the ordinary to the extraordinary. We have to move out of the four walls, assess the needs of the community and exactly where they are.

Today we can appreciate three types of churches according to the focus of their work.

1. **The city church.** It is expected that people attend church. The majority of the programs, seminars, classes or campaigns are done within the church walls and for the church members. The prime beneficiaries are the members.

2. **The church against the city.** There is a defensive attitude toward the city culture. Constantly the preaching about the sins of the city, the dangers being contaminated and the members are urged to cut ties with them. This is a church that lives in its own bubble of sanctification.

3. **The church for the city.** This is the church that mingles with the community to serve and to testify. This is the church that visits the community and takes its programs on salvation and service to the homes, parks, community halls, restaurants and commercial centers. etc.

Our churches needs to venture into the community to help those in need. Many of the needs are health related. Not only physical health, but mental, emotional, social and spiritual.

Conclusion.

The Desire of Ages indicates:

"In His providence, God guided the pathways of the priest and the Levite along the way where the suffering man was lying so they could appreciate his need for mercy and help. **The heavens were watching** to see if the hearts of these men would be moved and show some pity to human tragedy."

(Speaking about the Samaritan) "**He did not consider that he was exposing himself also to violence**, when he stopped in the place. " It was sufficient that before him there was a human being who had become a victim of need and suffering".

"Unless we practice self-sacrifice for the good of others, in our family circle, in the neighborhood, in church and wherever we can, we **are not Christians** no matter what our profession be."

These are powerful quotes from the Desire of Ages!

Heaven constantly watches to see if we practice our Christianity with those who suffer and are in need.

One Sabbath as the invited Pastor was preaching about the love that we must show to the community, a member in attendance raised his hand asking for

permission to speak. It is not common practice to accede to interruptions from the congregation while the sermon is being developed during the Divine Service. However, this person insisted so much that the pastor acknowledged his petition. The man stood up and said: "Pastor, how we can show love to those outside if there is no love among us. Then he continued: "this week my wife loss her sister and none of the church members accompanied us during the funeral service".

It is quite obvious that this brother had some resentment against the church members. The Pastor was quick to recognize the problem so he put aside his sermon and apologized in name of the church to the brother. He called the hurting family to the altar to pray for them and invited the congregation to come forward and offer a hug of condolence to the family.

The church cried with them; and between hugs, apologies and condolence, the Holy Spirit influenced the church for reconciliation, for unity and to be more emphatic.

For that reason Jesus said "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:35)

May God help you to love as He loves us that you may help those in need. Your motivation must be the great love that He has placed in you; with your help the whole church may become active in a ministry of love.