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Faith Des Peres Presbyterian Church
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Luke 10:25-37

“Creating”

If you’ve been around the past three weeks, you know we’ve been talking about evangelism. Evangelism is a scary word for most mainline, Protestant Christians because we have this vision in our heads that evangelism means we need to strong arm people into believing what we believe or go out and convert people to Christianity. But as I’ve said for the past three weeks, The definition I’m using for evangelism is sharing **something** we enjoy with someone we like.

If you earn nothing else during this series, please learn this: evangelism is sharing something we enjoy with someone we like.

We talked some last week in the Adult Discussion Group about evangelism and tried to get at why we have difficulty doing it. Someone wondered aloud that maybe we have so much difficulty with evangelism is that we don’t know how to talk about our faith. We somehow have it in our minds that we need to be able to talk about complex doctrines or know the Bible frontwards and backwards to talk about our faith. And if we can’t do that then we’re going to get caught with our pants down. But as I said to them, don’t head down the road of talking about complex or doctrines or quoting Bible verses. And honestly, the people we’re trying to reach and are going to appeal to the most, will probably be turned off by such a thing. Instead, talk about your church, talk about your struggles, share your story.

Tell about my faith journey. Born and raised a Presbyterian, etc. Grew up in a large church, knew the large church, felt comfortable there, and thought I was destined to be an Associate Pastor. Fell in love, got married, needed to figure out together “what’s next?”

I ended up receiving the grant, which led to me becoming the founder and executive director of an organization by the name of Interfaith Volunteer Caregivers of Portage County, which I am very proud to say is still going strong. *Tell about IVC.*

Never, in a million years, did I picture my faith journey taking that path. If someone had said to me my first two years of seminary, “Oh, by the way, your first call will not be as an Associate Pastor. In fact, it won’t even be to a church,” I would have told them they were crazy. But there I was, building this organization from nothing. Literally, knocking on peoples’ doors and trying to get community leaders and clergy to support it, and then recruiting and training volunteers and placing them with their care recipients and writing grants and raising money and all sorts of stuff. And it was all very exciting to **see** something grow from nothing to something.

As I was thinking about this part of my faith journey, I also remembered all of the people who helped me to get IVC going, because obviously I couldn't do it on my own. I thought about Marti Smith, the woman from the Dept. on Aging who gave me the grant; who saw something in me that I didn't see in myself. I thought about the Director the Health and Human Services Dept. who supported IVC from the get-go, sending my way grants and support staff and board members. I often think of Edie Kraus, who was this incredible mover and shaker in the community and so well respected. Everyone wanted Edie on their Board. And I was so nervous when I first met with her to ask if she would serve on the Board of this as-yet-to-be established organization, and she said yes. And the deep friendship we share despite our 50 year age difference.

There were so many people who helped. So many people who put their reputations on the line, who stepped out in faith, who joined me in this risky venture. They could have easily sat back and said, "Uhm, call me in a year. Call me when you're established." But instead they invested their lives, their time, and their money into this organization called IVC, so the elderly and disabled and their caregivers could receive supportive services and respite care at no cost. The sacrifice they made is still helping people today.

The reason I'm sharing this with you is that I am so impressed by people who invest something of themselves and who think less of themselves and their needs and wants and instead think more about what could be, about what is possible. People like that are pioneers. They're innovators and entrepreneurs. They're willing to risk something of themselves for the sake of someone and something else. They are creators. What we did was risky. We didn't have any guarantee it would work. But we did it anyways. We stepped out of our comfort zone to follow a different path. And in so doing, we created something that still has a legacy today.

As I was thinking about all of this, it struck me that this is what we are called to do; that we are called to create. We are hard-wired to be creators. God created us to be creators. But we live in a world and a culture that tells us to be consumers. You're made to be a creator, but you're tempted to be a consumer.

Are you a creator or a consumer?

Think about that. We like to have this narrative about ourselves that we pulled ourselves up by our bootstraps without any assistance from anyone else. What was it Bill Clinton said in his speech? Every politician wants you to believe that they were born in a log cabin they built themselves. Ain't that the truth. But think about it; we like to have this narrative that we've gotten by without any assistance from anyone else.

But if you look at it through a different lens, aren't you a recipient of all sorts of people who have given up things so that you could be here?

Let's think about this: anyone who has received a scholarship is a recipient; each scholarship represents someone who gave up their money and invested it in you. They created something. All of us here are the recipients of veterans and their families giving

up something, sometimes their lives. Towns and cities were founded by people who left their comfortable places in order to create something new. All around us are examples. If you work in a company or business chances are someone mentored you and took the time to answer your questions and help you along as you were starting out or messing up and needed guidance. They took their precious time to help you. Think about the teachers or coaches who helped you. Think about those people. Who are they? Thank God for them in your prayers today, because they who thought less of themselves and more about you. Those people are creators.

You know I don't often preach the creation story. But if you paid any attention at all to the story when Rufus read, you heard that word "create" over and over again. *So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*"

One verse, three creates. You know when someone tells you the same thing over and over again it must be really important and mean something to them? Well, the author of Genesis is the same way. The author wants us to know that this creating business is really important.

If you ever find yourself asking those really big questions of life, such as what brings me fulfillment? What should I be doing? Look back at this story. The author is very clear that we were created to create. And right after this verse, scripture says: "God blessed them and God said to them, be fruitful and multiply." Go, create.

Are you a creator or consumer?

Scripture tells us that we will find more joy, more happiness and more fulfillment by being creators instead of consumers. *"Be fruitful and multiply." In other words, bear fruit. Leave something behind.*

But the culture tells us otherwise. The culture tells us we'll find joy in being a consumer. And we've bought into that mentality. We are a nation of consumers. And we're taught that it's good; it's good for us, it's good for our nation, and it's good for our economy. We buy food we didn't grow; we purchase clothes we didn't make; we live in houses we didn't build. We are consumers.

But we were made to create. "Be fruitful and multiply."

A creator bears fruit. A consumer buys it and eats.

A creator gives up something he or she enjoys so that other people might enjoy something; whereas a consumer expects other people to give up things so that they can have the things they enjoy.

Friends, this is a real problem this consumer mentality. And it's affecting churches in a really big way. Generations ago people created churches; now we close them. It worries

me. We are a generation of church consumers. People choose churches based on their wants and needs, and when the church no longer meets those wants or needs, they move on to the next thing. And there are times when that is an appropriate thing to do, but there are other times when that's not a very faithful thing to do.

When Jesus sends the 12 disciples out to proclaim the good news, cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, and cast out demons, he makes it look so easy. He's gone to cities and synagogues and cured every ailment he encounters. No distance was too great, no disease too severe, and no audience too skeptical.

But when he commissions the twelve he lets them know it's not going to be so easy for them. That things are going to be difficult. Anyone who has stuck with a church throughout its difficulties knows that's true. But Christ confidently sends out the disciples, and therefore sends us out, despite the difficulties, despite the questionable likelihood of success, despite the challenges.

And he tells them to take nothing for their services: take no gold or silver or copper, no bag or tunic or sandals or staff. He asked them to make sacrifices so that they could create this alternative kingdom Jesus has been preaching. Have you ever thought about what hardship or sacrifice you would make in order to create something here? Have you thought about what you would be willing to give up?

Jesus gives the disciples one last instruction, and it's an important one for people to hear. He tells them that not everyone will welcome them and their message. And when that happens, he says, shake the dust from your feet and move on. Not everyone will want to hear the message you have to tell; not everyone will be receptive. But don't let that deter you; don't let that dampen your spirits. Shake the dust from your feet and move.

Because here's the thing . . . and the one thing we sometimes forget during all the feet dusting. Amazing, wonderful things have happened throughout history through ordinary members of the church. Due in part to the efforts made by faithful Christians, creators, diseases thought to be incurable have been eradicated; unjust laws have been overturned; and people who thought doors would never have been open to them have seen them swing wide open.

Friends, wonderful things have happened here because of people like you. Alcoholics have found recovery; soldiers have received blankets; people have met Christ; others have experienced God's love; children have been taught the faith; youth have been confirmed; babies have been baptized; adults have reached new understandings; couples have been married; children have received Christmas presents; parents have received a break from the pressure; musicians have been nurtured; the saints have been honored; the life and resurrection of those who have died has been celebrated; gardens have grown, food has been harvested, and people have been fed; landscapes have been improved; the lives of abused women and their children have been enhanced; electronics have been recycled; rides have been given; meals have been donated; pets have been blessed; and

prayers have been offered; the dying have found comfort; the community has been welcomed; citizens have voted; and you have worshipped.

That is the work of creators.

That is the work of God's people fulfilling Christ's mission in the world.

Is this a story worth sharing with someone you like?

Next week we're going to celebrate the fruit of our creating efforts when we accept five new people into membership and two baptisms. I hope you will be here for this very important service. And I hope and pray that you will share your story so that we can more of these celebrations and create something here . . .to indeed be fruitful and multiply.

May it always be so.

Amen.

Bless O God, all creation.

The sun that rises every morning, the clouds that bring us rain and the moon in the dark night sky. Bless us that we may be a blessing to all we meet.

Heal us O God, from all that ails us - illness, disease, despair, hunger, thirst, anxiety and loneliness. Heal us and all creation.

Bless the leaders of nations and fill them with wisdom. Bless the leaders of cities and towns that all can work in unity for the wellbeing of everyone, all creation. And bless the creators, the people who think less of themselves, and more about what could be, about what is possible.

Help us, O God to be your disciples. To listen with open ears and to heal with open hearts. Help us, O God to be your disciples and to share your story and our story with people we know, care about, and meet. We pray all of this in the name of your Son, who taught us how to pray together saying . . .

Amen.