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Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Let’s Get Real with Each Other

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Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 Common English Bible

Two are better than one because they have a good return for their hard work. If either should fall, one can pick up the other. But how miserable are those who fall and don’t have a companion to help them up! Also, if two lie down together, they can stay warm. But how can anyone stay warm alone? Also, one can be overpowered, but two together can put up resistance. A three-ply cord doesn’t easily snap.

We have spent the last few weeks talking about being real with one another. We know that there is pain in every one of our stories. We are real, broken, hurting people. We are a real church for real people with real problems, and we realize that to love each other well we have to be honest with one another. To love each other well, we have to try and put ourselves in the shoes of one another. We do this to try to begin to have understanding for what we are going through. To love each other, we have to have compassion for one another. We are called to feel other people’s pain and acknowledge what is not right about us, and what is not right about our world. And when we can’t fix it, we sit with the pain of it.

So, how do we be real with one another? It starts with getting to know our names, and sharing with one another about our lives. It means hearing our stories, stories of joy and stories of pain. It takes time, but it is important because we need one another. In 2 Samuel 11 there is a story about King David. David was walking around the roof of the king’s house and he saw a woman, Bathsheba, bathing who was very beautiful. Bathsheba became pregnant so David sent for her husband, Uriah, who was fighting in a war for the king. Uriah would not leave the king’s house and visit his wife Bathsheba at his own house. So, David sends Uriah back to the battle and Uriah is carrying a note to the captain of the army from David. The letter says to set Uriah in the front of the hardest fighting and then draw back from him so that he may be struck down and die. Uriah does die and David marries Bathsheba. 2

2 Samuel 12 begins saying, “But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord and the Lord sent Nathan to David.” Nathan was a court prophet for King David. Nathan shares a story with David about two men, one was rich and the other poor. The rich man had many flocks and herds and the poor man had one sheep which he raised with his children and was like a daughter to him. A traveler comes to the rich man and the rich man takes the poor man’s sheep to serve to the traveler for dinner. David gets very angry with the story and says to Nathan, “the man who has done this deserves to die.” Nathan tells David, “you are the man!” David realizes what he has done, and that he is the man and he says to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.”

I think about the courage that Nathan had to speak truth to David. I think about the courage that David had to listen and to be able to see that he had done a horrible thing. We need other people in our lives as the words from Ecclesiastes remind us.

This week my sister had car trouble but she said that she would get her car back in time for school pick-up. But, there were more repairs that needed to be made and so she did need help, but she didn’t want to ask for help. She told me, “I don’t like to depend on others.” But we are a part of a faith community, a faith family and we need each other. I believe with you. You believe with me. We help each other to believe. We believe for each other when it is hard to believe.

Do you remember the story of David and Goliath? That is when King David was just a boy and it is when he meets his friend Jonathan for the first time. Jonathan is the son of the King at the time, Saul. In 1 Samuel 18 it says at their first meeting, “the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.” Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as his own soul. Jonathan gives David his robe, his armor, his sword, his bow and his belt and David is successful in every attack that King Saul sends him on and King Saul put David in charge of the army. David is very successful and King Saul gets jealous of his son Jonathan’s new friend. So, Saul tries to kill David by sending David out again into battle. David has success after success and the people start cheering louder for David than for Saul. Saul grows more and more afraid of David because of his success and he continues to talk about killing him. But Saul’s son, Jonathan, delights in David, so Jonathan warns David and tells him to hide. Jonathan talks to his dad and helps his dad to reconcile with David but the reconciliation doesn’t last long and Saul is hunting David again. David goes to Jonathan asking what he has done. He tries to understand why Saul is attacking him. Jonathan gives David strength. They renew their covenant as friends and Saul and David reconcile but Saul and his son Jonathan die in battle. When David learns of their death he sings a lament that says, “Saul and Jonathan, beloved and pleasant in their life, And in their death they were not parted; They were swifter than eagles, They were stronger than lions... How have the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan is slain on your high places. I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; You have been very pleasant to me. Your love to me was more wonderful than the love of women. How have the mighty fallen, And the weapons of war perished!” (2 Samuel 1:23-27).

David and Jonathan had this life-long friendship. They drew strength from each other. They had to forgive each other and trust each other and share what was on their heart with each other. They had to be real with one another. Have you ever heard the old joke about a man who was dying lying in a hospital bed? As he laid there, he remembered an old enemy he once held a grudge against. So he called a nurse to his bedside, and he asked her to get his old enemy. The enemy arrived, and the man opened one eye, and said to him, "My enemy, I have called you here today to say I'm sorry for all the wrong I've done to you."  Then he paused, and added, "But mind you, if I ever get BETTER, I’m still going to hold it against you!” You have to give the man credit. He was honest. He was real.

Being real with each other in this church, being real with your friends and family and co-workers means that you have to constantly forgive others and forgive yourself. We are instructed to confess our sins to one another and pray for one another so that we may be healed. This is found in James 5:16. We are healed together, by sharing our hearts with one another. We want to think that we can do life on our own. We want to think that we don’t need anyone else. We want to think that we don’t even need God. We want to think we are okay. But we aren’t. We need each other. My sister needed me. David needed Jonathan. Jonathan needed David. Saul needed them both. We ALL need each other.

I was listening to a podcast Friday and Suzanne Stabile who teaches the enneagram said something about change and transformation that I am going to have to sit with for a long time. She said, “Change is when you take on something new and transformation is when something old falls away. It is usually beyond your control.” We are transformed when the old idea of doing life all by ourselves falls away. We are transformed when we see that we need others. We are transformed when we reach out and find that others are reaching right back to us. Amen.