

"WHEN A BANDAID WON'T DO"
(Sermon by Rev. Don Parsons)

Scripture Lesson:- Mark 8: 27 - 38

Do you know what I learned in Grandpa School? That a box of Band-Aids is critical in every grandparent's basic survival kit.

// A toddler falls and bumps her knee, and even though there is no visible sign of a wound, the only thing that can fix it is a kiss, and a hug, and most important of all a Band-Aid.

Because for some reason a Band-Aid makes everything feel better.

Not only that. I have learned that a Band-Aid is also an important fashion statement.

No longer do our grandkids put up with wearing one of those skin-toned Band-Aids that no one notices. Now there are Sesame Street Band-Aids, and Dora the Explorer band-aids, and, yes even Spiderman Band-Aids...

For little nicks and cuts and blisters and burns, and grandkids' real or imagined wounds, nothing makes things better like a Band-Aid. //

The word has also come into our everyday language.

We talk about a "band-aid" solution - meaning a quick temporary fix, something that is good for now but just won't last forever.

// Some might regard my place with you while the search for our new minister continues as a band-aid solution. Hopefully my part-time work in the areas of worship planning and preaching not only is a support for other members of the staff, but might help you to relax, and perhaps feel a bit better - like a band-aid. //

Sometimes we even use prayer as a kind of band-aid - a quick fix to make everything better.

// A person being interviewed on a "Christian Talk Show" tells how in the midst of her ironing, she decided to go to the supermarket for groceries. As she is driving in her car several blocks from home, she remembers the iron, but she cannot remember whether she turned it off or not. She didn't want to take the time to go all the way back to check, so she said that she prayed about it. "Jesus, could you turn off the iron?"

"And was it off when you got home?" "Yes it was. It was an answer to prayer. Praise the Lord!" A group of students sit in a circle, light a candle, burn some incense, hold hands, and enter into a period of prayer. "Jesus, you know how much fun I had last weekend at the beach with my friends. Could you give me another weekend like that...?"

"God, I know that I should be studying instead of going to the movies tonight, so I'm just asking you to please see that I get at least a "B" in the Chemistry exam tomorrow."

"Jesus, I'd really like a new pair of runners. Converse would be great. Thank you Jesus." //

Now I firmly believe in and have also experienced the power of prayer in my own life.

But this kind of band-aid prayer is offensive to me - using prayer as a frivolous wish list, and using Jesus as a kind of cosmic errand boy, scurrying around to give me what I want, for

my life, now!

// Karl Barth once observed that most people at some level, long for “a faith with size.” //

By “a faith with size” I think he means faith that churns out of the cauldron of the struggles in which you and I find ourselves – life and death struggles for meaning and purpose, for hope and peace of mind and spirit....

It is faith that band-aid prayer cannot touch.

It is Gethsemane-great-drops-of-blood kind of prayer;

it is sighs-too-deep-for-words prayer;

it is “Lord-I-believe-please-help-my-unbelief” kind of prayer...

Many of us know what “the cauldron of life’s struggles” feels like.

To describe it we use words like “wilderness”, or “emptiness”, or “heavy load”, or “burn-out” when we find ourselves in that deep and dark valley.

Has it ever been that way for you -- worn down with weariness; very little fuel left in the tank?

// Bob Smith, highly respected minister of the Eglinton congregation and former Moderator of our church once told me that his fuel tank felt so empty that it was as if he was sucking rust. //

Well a band-aid faith is not very helpful when one feels that kind of personal depletion.

In such moments what we need is not some cosmic Santa Claus to respond to our list of frivolous wants, but instead the Christ who does not shy away from the cauldron of the crucifixion, Jesus the Christ who has promised to be with us when the way is heavy and dark and the soul is dry.

As we listen in on the conversation between Jesus and his disciples in this morning’s gospel, we sense that Jesus is trying to help his friends move to a deeper place in their relationship with him.

Remember the story?

Jesus wants the disciples to tell him what the polls are saying. “Who do people say that I am?”

He wants some analysis, some information. They respond that some think he may be John the Baptist or one of the prophets come back from the dead.

And then Jesus shifts this safe conversation from information *about* him, to something more personal.

“Ah yes,” he says, “but who do *you* say that I am?”

(What does the relationship we share mean *to you*?)

Peter responds, “Why you are the long-awaited Messiah,” – a response shaped I suspect by the Messianic hope for a political figure who will run the Romans out of Palestine and set them free – a saviour on a white horse at the front of a victory parade.

But Jesus says, “No...no...no... I will be rejected; I will be humiliated; and endure a hideous execution.”

And then he warns them that if they dare to be his disciples, they can probably expect the same; that a relationship with him does not mean “happy clappy church”, but taking up a cross... and following...

"Who do you say that I am?" he asks *us*, pushing us out of our comfort zone.

3.

Well, I hope we recognize him not as a Santa figure who comes to grant us our frivolous wishes.
But rather a Messiah who comes out of the love of the God who tosses the stars into the
black abyss of space, and gives delicate fragrance to the rose.
This Messiah comes with our name on his lips, to sit with us in our pain,
to walk with us in our loneliness and fear.
He weeps with us when the hurt swells the lump in the throat,
and laughs with us when life is so full of wonder and awe we can do nothing
but sing and dance.

He is the size of the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.

He is love so potent and personal and powerful, that there is nothing in all of creation that can
ever destroy it. And he comes, this Jesus the Christ, and offers us the gift of his love.

// Many of you know that L'Arche/Daybreak, in Richmond Hill, is Jean Vanier's wonderful
community for adults who have very challenging physical, mental and emotional needs.
One day a group of them were being led in some Bible Study together. They were reading a passage in
which the word "love" appeared several times. And the question was asked, "What do you
think 'love' is?"
There was some awkward silence, and then a wee woman towards the back of the group – one of the
core members, a woman who had been abandoned very early in life and now had found her
family here at L'Arche said, "I think 'love' is when God holds you tight..."
The leader said, "That's a beautiful thought. Do you think we could show what that might look like?"
So they held open their arms for each other, and this wee lady limped her way towards the leader.
Just before they came together she stopped, and said,
"Wait a minute. Which one of us is God?" //

Is it possible that this frail, once-forgotten woman has given us a glimpse of holy truth?
If 'love' is when God holds you tight, then can it ever be possible to distinguish which one of us
is God for the other?

// For me a conversation Henri Nouwen records in one of his books offers an important clue.
During that period when Dr. Nouwen was teaching at Yale University, a student who had graduated a
few months earlier contacted him and asked if he could return to the campus. He would like to
share some personal time with his former professor. They arranged to meet a few weeks later.
At one point in their visit, there was a substantial period of silence between them.
Finally the former student said, "When I am with you, it is as though I am in the presence of
Christ himself." Dr. Nouwen replied, "It is the Christ in you who recognizes the Christ in
me, and makes us brothers who love each other." //

May I suggest that it was that kind of deep, life-giving love to which Jesus was inviting his disciples
that day? This is no band-aid kind of love.

This is love we do not deserve, cannot earn, and barely begin to understand...

It is the kind of love that is thrust upon a cross of wood... and nailed there...

What can we possibly do when we are offered such love?

Maybe simply accept it.... just that... Amen.