

Sermon, November 22, 2020
Ezekiel 34:11-26 Matthew 25:31-46
“A Life that Speaks: Care”
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Many of you might remember writer Erma Bombeck. She wrote finding humor in normal suburban life in Dayton, Ohio. But as most good humorists, there were times when wisdom, even pathos, were found in her writing.

I remember reading a column she wrote once on how protective her mother was. To the point where her mother never trusted seatbelts. Any time she came to a fast stop, she instinctively put out her arm to protect her daughter even though she was strapped in to the car. It wasn't planned, it was just a part of her personality to protect those she loved.

Bombeck writes of a time when her mother, now much older, was riding in her daughter's car and another car runs a stop sign right in front of them. Bombeck slammed on the breaks and found herself throwing her arm out in front of her mother to protect her. It was then, Bombeck wrote, I began to realize that our roles were being reversed. I drove more, I made more decisions for my mother, I was the one making sure she was ok in the car.

Their roles had reversed. Not by design, but by the natural progression of life. We become, in some ways, the people we are around the most, and we, often if we are around them a lot, will find ourselves taking on their mantle someday as Bombeck did for her mother, and as I imagine some of who have taken on for

your parents. The longer we are around people, the more we may become like them. Intimacy, close relationships, are formational.

And I don't know I am telling you anything new by saying that. You know that intimate relationships are formational. We noted this a couple of weeks ago when we had an infant baptism. We recognized that a child is going to be formed spiritually, right or wrong, by the body of Christ that surrounds the child. You've witnessed that formation at almost any funeral you have been to. Often at a funeral, someone will stand to give a eulogy, a close friend or family member, and they will share not only how wonderful the person was, but how they helped shape them into the person they are now. If not at a eulogy, then sitting around in conversation or at a funeral meal.

One of the things to note about that is that the formation is almost never intentional. In other words, I am now etching you these three life lessons, and there will be a test at the end of the week. No, rather those lessons are taught in relationship in formation. By watching, observing, and spending time. It just happens, and they will sometimes mention how they want to be more like that person, a mantle passed on to them. Again, the deeper the relationship, the more formational it tends to become, and the more like that person we tend to become, as well. Intimacy creates formation. Formation creates change.

This idea that formation creates change is at the heart of the Scripture we read this morning. It is important for us, by the way, to note this is not a parable. Over the past couple of weeks, we have read parables of Jesus, about His return, and that our time is short. He continues today to talk about those times and the final judgment. But we must be clear, this is not a parable or a story. It's not an analogy. Jesus speaks clearly this is what is going to happen. None of us will escape this time of judgment before God. So we tend to make sure we are paying particular attention to what is being said.

Jesus speaks clearly to our theme for this sermon series. How we live matters. How we live speaks volumes about what we believe. In this passage, Jesus looks at how we live and asks us what does your life say about how you have lived?

Jesus says one day the sheep and the goats will be separated. You may be familiar with this Scripture where Jesus separates us based on one thing and will judge us on one thing. But what? What does Jesus say He will judge us on? It's not what I think most people normally assume? Well, it's clear He judges us on how much we do for the unfortunate, and those who do a lot for the unfortunate will get into heaven and those who were selfish and mean will not. Seems really clear.

But look at it again. I'd encourage you to sit down later today and really read through this. Because what Jesus says, come into the Kingdom because you knew Me or be gone, you never knew Me. You never let our relationship shape and form you into something new, into more than you are right now.

You know, both groups probably assumed they had done the right things. They called Jesus Lord. Probably were good people. Went to worship, gave. All the stuff you could go down a check list and assume these have been good religious people and will certainly make it into heaven.

But Jesus says how you lived told a different story. If you had known, you would have lived differently. When Jesus talks about knowing Him, He isn't talking about information or more facts. He uses language that denotes relationship intimacy. In other words, we never had an intimate relationship that formed and made you into someone new.

But Jesus says do you know we had that relationship or didn't have that relationship? I went to church. I served on a committee. And Jesus answers how you lived tells me how much you were formed into My image. Because, Jesus says here, if you had allowed our relationship to deepen, you would see Me in every person you meet. Isn't that what Jesus says? Enter into my Kingdom because you fed Me, you clothed Me, visited Me? Jesus, when did we do that? You did it every time you saw Me in the forgotten people around you.

Be gone, you never knew Me? Lord, how can you say that? Because you could never see Me in the eyes and lives of the people I placed all around you. Can you see the difference? Jesus isn't saying doing good to others gets you into heaven. He says what you do, how you live, is an indicator of how close we actually are.

So, let me ask you, who do you see? When you look at others, at everyone, who do you see? And I mean everyone. Some of us are just naturally nice people and empathic people, and we are drawn to the unfortunate. Easiest thing in the world to see Jesus in them. But do you see Jesus in everyone? In people, in power? In people who have disappointed you, made mistakes, done the wrong thing? Who are still arrogant, still unrepentant? Are you so formed in Jesus that you see Christ in everyone and want to serve Him by loving everyone? In particular, the hurting and the unfortunate in life?

Intimacy brings formation. Formation brings change. Have you been changed by Jesus? In some ways, Jesus here is talking about passing the mantle. You'll remember, we began today talking about Erma Bombeck learning as she was formed, her role had changed, the mantle had been passed. Isn't that what Jesus is saying here? You are My sheep. But the longer you are My sheep, the longer you become like the shepherd. And the longer you become like the shepherd, you begin to take on the role of the shepherd. Loving the sheep Jesus puts in your path every day. Taking care of the hurting, loving the unnoticed, guiding and protecting those the world does not protect. Are you shepherding those around you, those that Jesus has placed in your care?

So how do we get to that point? How do we find that intimacy. I don't think it's that difficult, really. Just begin to live the way He wants us to live. Love others even when you can't see Jesus in them. Care for the hurting even when Christ isn't evident. The more we do Christ's work, the more we become like Him, the more time we spend with Him, the more we become like Him. I suspect the more you love and help people even when you can't see Jesus in them, the more your eyes will be opened by the Holy Spirit, and the more you will see Jesus. There are people in our life today who need to know someone sees more in them than the world does. Will it be you? Amen.