

Origins

Prayer

Salmo is a great place to live isn't it? It is such a beautiful place. It has gorgeous mountains and scenery. It is truly interesting to look at the roots of something to understand what has formed it into what it has become.

Did you know that Salmo was originally called Salmon Siding? In fact the Salmo river was originally called the salmon river. They decided to change the name to avoid confusion with other similarly named places in BC

Our lovely village was formed as a mining town. What was once a hub of the mining industry has become a quiet but exciting community where people from the surrounding areas come to hike, fish, bike, golf, ski, swim and various other things.

Now Ymir was originally called quartz creek. The townsite was laid out 1897. The name was changed to Ymir. It was called Ymir after the father of all ice giants in Scandinavian mythology whom Odin slew to make the world from his bones, blood and skull.

Does it add something when we understand origins? I would go so far as to say that the more we know about the origin of something the more we gain insight as to why it has become what it has become.

Let's shift gears for a minute.

I am not into labeling but let's say there is an addict or a drunkard that you know in Salmo.

So often I hear people condemning a person for drinking or their addiction. After all these behaviors are not acceptable in polite society. The person may smell of alcohol or body odor. They may use coarse language, they may dress in an unconventional way, anyone who has been here during shambalha festival time knows what I am talking about. Our village gets filled with some pretty interesting characters, they may be angry or rude or otherwise disagreeable.

How do we see these people? Do we put on our cultural glasses? Do we assess their behavior in light of what we find acceptable?

How about a single mom?

How do we see her? Do we judge her? Do we look at her and whisper sotto voce and speculate or gossip about how she got her self into the predicament she is in?

If understanding the origins of a place helps us to understand how it has developed its unique character and helps us to recognize the influences of the past; then why as a people, a society, a community is it not common practice to get to know the person and find out about their past before so many look down upon or pass judgment.

Do we look at people in context and with the eyes of Christ or from a worldly perspective?

I remember a story about a guy who was standing on a crowded bus. He was holding on to one of those handles that dangle from the roof so he didn't falter or stumble.

He was standing there minding his own business when he was bumped into. The guy thought to himself, "I guess they must have stumbled, no big deal" when all of a sudden he was bumped into again... The guy thought to himself: "What is this guys deal. Clumsy much?" but, he still let it slide. About 2k down the road he gets bumped into again. By this point he is getting a bit ticked off. He starts thinking "what a jerk." ...and starts getting angry. Another kilometer down the road and he gets bumped again. Fed up now he turns around to give the person a piece of his mind and maybe a fat lip, he is ticked off.

When he turns around he sees a blind man with a white cane standing behind him, oblivious to the fact that there are even handles to hold on to. No one has stepped up to help the blind man. Upon seeing the man's obvious and visible condition his perspective shifted immediately. His judgment of the actions changed, his mood changed.

But why?

Did the blind person do anything different? He committed the same actions nothing there changed. What changed was that when he understood the person's situation and the origin of the problem, he found himself compassionate and understanding instead of judgmental.

We have the example of Jesus who in Matthew 9:10 we read: "And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples." Do you know what a publican is? It is a person who runs a bar...

Jesus knew that to speak into the life of an individual you needed to build relationship with them. He is truly God and knew them, but he provided this as an example to each of us. But why would we invest our time with these people? What is their value?

We are called to reach these people. We are called to be a lighthouse on a hill. Jesus tells us in verse 11 (...they that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.)

We see again in Luke 5:32: "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

One of the shortsighted things of our culture today is missing the value of something. Do we see the value in the lost and hurting? Do we see them as Jesus see's them or do we as our culture so often does, look at the state they are in and form our opinion based on that?

Illustration:

This morning I ask you to consider a \$100 bill. Don't we all like those new fresh \$100 bills that we put into our wallet from the bank? Now consider that I am holding one of them and I suddenly have to sneeze. The bill is in my hand... you get the picture. Now I get grossed out by it and drop it, but the wind comes up and so I step on it to keep it from blowing away. This makes it even dirtier and disgusting, it even adds a few rips...

How much is that \$100 bill worth now?

Illustration:

A collector of rare books ran into an acquaintance who told him that he had just thrown away an old Bible that he found in a dusty, old box. He happened to mention that Guten-somebody-or-other had printed it.

"Not Gutenberg?" gasped the collector.

"Yes, I think that was it," the man replied.

"Oh no! You've thrown away one of the first books ever printed. A copy recently sold at an auction for \$2,000,000!"

"Oh, I don't think this book would have been worth anything close to that much," replied the man. "It was scribbled all over in the margins by some guy named Martin Luther."

Let's go back to Matthew 9 and move down to verse 13. I will use the CEV as it uses plain English. Jesus says: "Go and learn what the scriptures mean when they say, 'Instead of offering sacrifices to me, I want you to be merciful to others,' I didn't come to invite good people to be my followers I came to invite sinners."

Another version puts it thusly:

But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

If you believe in Christ you are saved. His grace is sufficient for us. His Holy Spirit works in us. He works to bring about the likeness of Christ within us. We are blessed!

How many of you have read a novel?

Whatever has been done is capable of being narrated into a story. In fact, if you will bear with me, I would suggest that for the moment at least we think of our own lives as a story. I use this technique in counseling all the time. Each of us has a personal history, a story that details the events of our lives. If you think about it for a minute you will soon discover that your story is an account in which what you have done has had consequences, either positive or negative. Your story shows a structured purpose. If I were to read your story today, I would see how what you have done and the results that were achieved showed the intents of what you were trying, sometimes successfully, sometimes not, to accomplish. In your story, nothing is irrelevant to you.

When we think of God, we often abstract away into streets of gold, no sorrow, no pain, unending Joy and happiness, no struggle, no strife and so on. This morning, I ask us to consider the book of Ruth. This book in the bible is the story of a woman named Naomi and her two daughters-in-Law who experienced hardship, had a couple of daughters in law, asked them to leave for their own good, Orpah did, Ruth didn't. It is a great story and tells us many things. We even know that Ruth was the grandmother of king David and an ancestor to Jesus himself. But here is my point... on the surface it is not a grand tale of the mighty or rich, it is a tale that brings us into contact with a real person in the everyday struggle of life. It does not take place at a royal temple or in a kingly court, but rather in a humble village in the land of Judah.

When we say that everyone matters or that we love all people. We are declaring what this church is all about. For a person who ministers to others in the body... A.K.A Christians... we have a model for how to take each person seriously.

How many want to see those who have drifted away from the church here restored? Well... take note here because people who have felt obscure and unnoticed, or who have been hurt and have become bitter, or have experienced perceived rejection have come to the church and have heard the story of the Gospel of Christ but, an here is the kicker, have failed to find their place in it. They have not discovered where they fit in. It is our job as a church to seek and save the lost. In this case I ask us to consider that they are people who feel left out of salvation history.

Now to be fair the person who doesn't feel at home in the church has very often done something wrong. They are many times experiencing conviction that they don't like within themselves and the enemy is often whispering condemnation into their ears.

Our churches have failed to deal with this because there is a tendency to bypass all the complexities that we find in the lives of the people around us or if you will, their stories and simply proscribe a series of moralistic pronouncements to a problem that only "band aids" the situation or in many cases makes the situation worse. To be effective in caring for each other we cannot simply throw around these Band-Aids like Jobs comforters. If as Christians and ministers of the Gospel if we only carry around a bunch of moral pronouncements in our pockets we do more harm than good. We need to learn to tell the Gospel story.

We need to actively listen to the complex stories that those around us tell us; which can take some commitment and some time.

I would suggest that we need to learn how to be effective listeners and storytellers. Consider this...

The moralizing Christian is like a clerk in a pharmacy who has a whole bunch of off the counter, one size fits all solutions to the symptoms that ail the person who they are serving. Let's say a man with a headache comes into the pharmacy with a headache. The clerk may sell the man some Tylenol that may help, but probably does do much for the undiagnosed underlying brain tumor.

The storytelling Christian is like a doctor who listens attentively, the doctor takes a history on the patient and probes the issues before prescribing a prescription or some remedial action.

So why are there so many clerks and so few physicians?

It is because relationship, active listening and probing the details are often uncomfortable, time consuming and emotionally exhausting. It is far easier when someone comes to you and says, I don't understand God, why does he hate me to simply say something like: "read your bible and pray more."

It is a generic off the shelf solution that may help, but the person has not attached their story to the Gospel of Jesus. Are prayers and reading the solution to a lot of problems? ... Absolutely, but we say that we love all people. Does that love come out as a series of platitudes and moral pronouncements or does it come out in relationship and loving care?

Why do I use a storytelling model today?

We are all very busy and can become bored with people who are trying to overcome what is obvious to us, irritated with troublesome or difficult people. When we get this way often times condescension comes out, the person needing care gets hurt and falls away. But if we approach each other with the interest of a person who loves the story, who listens and then picks up the story and relates it to the good news of the Gospel, then we can truly make a difference. Remember where I started everything we do is significant, God has made us all consequential and so what we do has consequences.

Stories create an expectation, we embrace the protagonist; we involve ourselves in the character. In this way the stories enhance, elaborate and develop as each detail is absorbed. The listener begins to truly understand how the individual got where they are and why they think what they do. They begin to identify with the other.

Listening is the first step on the journey to helping another discover Christ. When as a pastor I listen with patient intensity, my action has significance in that simply by actively listening it gives weight to what is being said. It steps out of the realm of gossip into the narrative of who the person is. Many times the sufferer doesn't know who they are in Christ, sometimes even who they are. They may define themselves by their job or their social status. You see when we listen to each other attentively the very act gives significance. If we don't take an interest in the mixed up and miscellaneous material of everyday life, evaluate it carefully, apply some skill in discernment, and read between the lines and determine what it all means then we cannot show the person needing our help how the providence of God is impacting their lives. We need to show where God's redemptive plan is operating in their lives despite the surface appearance to the contrary. When we do listen a pattern or plot begins to emerge.

It is a secular quote but I am reminded of the nineteenth-century clinician Laennec, you know the one who invented the stethoscope... who told his students: "Listen, listen to your patient, he is giving you the diagnosis"

Not every Christian is a pastor or a counselor or a deacon etc. But every Christian is charged with caring for each other and knowing how to do it properly can certainly help. Amen?

To be effective we need to listen, understand, and then place the person's story into the context of God's redemptive plan.

I am reminded of a historical Jewish Rabbi who had this right. His name was Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev... of him it was said: "The destitute, the ignorant, the misfits sought him out. His presence made them feel important; he gave them what they needed most; dignity"

This is what we mean when we say that we love all people. Once they know they are of value and who they are in Christ, then we must lead them back to the Joy and wider mission of what God has in mind for all of us in our community.

So what of our little church here in Salmo?

We are writing our story as a church... and folks, I cannot write that story alone.

The need is great. The harvest is great... But the workers are few... One of my professors once said something that I thought was so relevant I wrote it down. Here is what he said: "Many will choose not to participate in such work; neither counseling nor visitation... All pastors can do in counseling and visitation is to courteously invite persons to make and tell stories, and offer themselves and skilled collaborators in the work. If the person does not want to engage in the work, there is nothing the pastor can do about that"

But today I believe that Jesus is reaching out to the hearts here this morning, he is calling people who are willing to be the light on the hill. He is calling for his body to love those around them, to build relationships, to show mercy, to withhold judgment and to invest time and fellowship with people around us, so that we can truly understand and be compassionate.

I close with this scripture from Matthew 28:19: "Go to the people of all nations and make them my disciples. Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit..."

Prayer