

Just Walk Across the Room
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February 6, 2011

1) Introduce.

- a. We're coming to the close of our sermon series on hospitality- a series with the goal of introducing us to a yearlong congregational theme of creating a place for all to belong.
- b. This is the last sermon in the series. It's appropriate, perhaps for me to be here today. I'm new. In fact, I'll be attending my first membership class today with my wife Mary.
2. I am a recipient of Zumbro's hospitality.
 - i. People have walked across the room to greet me.
 - ii. They have introduced themselves and invited me to classes and groups and special congregational events.
 - iii. They've listened to my stories and helped me to feel that this is a place where I can belong.
- b. More profoundly, Jesus has walked across the room, across the world, across the cosmos for me and for you.
- c. We belong to God's Kingdom because of Jesus' hospitality. We belong and the Holy Spirit invites us to help others know that they belong too.
- d. Finding a place to belong isn't always easy- not even here. It's made easier, however, when people take the imitative, walk across the room and begin conversations. Something you'll have an opportunity to do this morning with the **"2 minute connection."** It is in these conversations and encounters, I believe, that the Holy Spirit works, creating divine, life changing moments. It can happen anywhere, inside and outside of the church.
3. The place to begin the Apostle Paul tells us, is with prayer.
 - a. In Col 4 he writes, "Devote yourself to prayer, being watchful and thankful..."
 - b. In other words, make prayer a priority in your life.
 - c. I was at the Seminary this week for an annual gathering with 3 of the Zumbro pastors and Lisa Kipp. One of the speakers, Dr. Marty Stortz, described prayer as speaking and listening to God. She encouraged us to move from only speaking to God in our prayers to speaking and listening to God. Dr. Stortz then quoted John Donne, **"today if you will hear his voice, he will hear you."**
 - d. Paul wants us to be devoted to prayer so that we hear God's voice and know that God hears ours
 - e. This is especially true when our burden is heavy.
 - (1) I thought that Pastor Jason gave us a powerful example of that last week.
 - (2) He told us about experiencing, as a young boy, God's voice through the love and kindness of friends, neighbors and strangers after his father, who suffered with the disease of alcoholism and was arrested for robbery, was taken away from the family.
 - ii. Paul wants all of us to hear God's voice and to know that God hears ours.

- f. Paul then adds, “**And pray for us too that God may open a door for our message...**”
- g. Pastor Vern, how might we pray that God would open a door for Zumbro’s message? (I’m almost a new member, I don’t know if I can challenge you, but would you devote yourself to pray for Zumbro Lutheran Church through the days of February like Pastor Vern asks? Maybe do it as you brush your teeth or make coffee or ride the bus to school in the morning, or during a quiet moment. Zumbro Lutheran Church asks for your prayers.)
4. Building on the foundation of prayer, Paul then writes, “**Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.**”
 - a. That’s quite a statement. Walking across the room for people isn’t just a focus for a period of time like a month or a year; it’s a life time focus from each of us.
 - b. Chicago area Pastor Bill Hybels gives a picture of what that might look like in his book, “Just Walk across the Room.” Hybels calls this **living 3-D.**
5. **First of all develop friendships.**
 - a. Notice people, lift up your head up from your own circles of comfort, scan the room for new people, people alone.
 - b. Then take the risk of walking across the room to them and start a conversation.
6. **While you’re in the conversation, discover the person’s story.**
 - a. We do that through listening.
 - b. Listening to people can make such a tremendous impact! A good friend of mine who teaches psychiatric nursing for Luther College here in Rochester received a letter from a former patient that one of her students cared for. It was a letter expressing gratitude for the student’s nursing care.
 - i. Although this particular student spent only a couple of hours interacting with the patient, she made a huge impact. In her letter the patient wrote this about the student:
 - ii. “She was young enough to be my daughter but was wise beyond her years; she oozed empathy and understanding and provided me with the most profound healing experience of my 10 day stay at Genrose.”
 - c. Discover the other person’s story, listen to them- listen to them until you really hear.
7. Finally, **Hybels writes, “... discern the promptings of the Holy Spirit to tell you what an appropriate next step might be.**
 - a. Maybe it’s to simply be friendly and welcoming?
 - b. Maybe it’s to give an invitation to a concert or a sporting event? Or to share a book or cup of coffee?
 - c. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you figure it out. The Holy Spirit knows what gifts you have, what you’re life situation is, what you do best. Ask for help.
 - d. So “**Walking Across the Room**” has these three parts: **develop friendships, discover the other person’s story and discern the promptings of the Holy Spirit.**
8. Let me give you an example of what this looks like from my

experience here at Zumbro.

- a. As I've mentioned, people have walked across the room for me. One of those people is Pastor Vern.
 - b. I first remember meeting him at a Rochester Clergy event about a year ago. Vern introduced himself, listened to my story and got to know me. He continued to walk across the room and talk with me at other gatherings.
 - c. A few months later, Vern invited me to play golf and then to go with him and a couple of his pastor friends from the Twin Cities on a golf retreat.
 - d. After my retirement, he noticed me here in church. He took me out to lunch; he invited me to attend a vision meeting of the congregation. He introduced my wife and I to other Zumbro members. And as part of a Christmas Eve service, he prayed for my family- all of us together holding hands being blessed with prayer. It was a great moment of Christmas. I know that many of you took advantage of that prayer time and also felt blessed.
 - e. Vern worked on our friendship, he listened to my story and he listened to the promptings of the Holy Spirit for appropriate next steps. **"I think it might be a good fit for you, Steve, to work with Pastor Jason on a special 40 day small group emphasis in the fall."** He told me. **"Really"** I said, **"Jason, I'd love too."**
9. What about you?
- a. Maybe through a simple word or action the Holy Spirit will use you to help someone feel God's love and know they have a place here to belong.
 - b. Pray about it and ask for guidance. Then listen for how the Holy Spirit responds, respond yourself and see what happens.