

We are pretty good at watching out for ourselves. Would you agree? We learn this early on in life.

I think about the story of a mother who heard a startling scream from her four-year-old son. She rushed into the playroom to see what was happening. There he sat while his baby sister, about 18-months-old was yanking on his hair with all her might.

The mother rushed over. She loosened the little girl's fingers from her brother's hair. She calmed down the older brother. While she was calming him and rocking him, she was assuring him that he would be okay. When he finally calmed down, she said to him, "Don't be so upset. Your little sister doesn't know that it hurts you."

She set him down. She went about her business. Several minutes later, the mother again heard a sharp scream coming from the playroom, this time it was from her little daughter. She went rushing into the playroom and she asked her son, "What on earth is wrong with your sister?"

"Not much," he said. "Except now she knows how much it hurts to have your hair pulled."

That little boy let his younger sister have it. He got even with her. He was really good at watching out for himself. But he is not the only one.

We can be good at watching out for ourselves too. In fact, we live in a society that tells us life is all about us. We live in a world that reminds us that we should take care of ourselves, we should watch out for ourselves. We live in a world that reminds us that we better get ours, before others get theirs.

The major problem with this type of thinking is, it is wrong. It ends up not only leaving us lonely and alone. But like the little boy and his younger sister, it often ends up hurting others. What can we do to counter this type of thinking that tells us life is all about us?

I think by being here, in worship today, we are beginning to take a step that helps us counter the influence of our culture. Today in worship, we are going to talk about another way we can counter the thinking of our

culture, we are going to wrap up our sermon series on *Discovering Christ, the Importance of Small Groups*. We are going to talk about one of the key elements of a small group in the life of the church, and that is being willing to serve.

To remind you where we have been, we started off talking about how small groups help us "Be the dot" or be Disciples of Christ. We spent time talking about how small groups help us be accountable for our actions and behaviors, allowing us to continuously look at our living so we can live more Christ-like in the world.

In our scripture for today, Jesus is starting his ministry. He has just finished healing some people, when he goes to Simon's house, where he heals Simon's mother-in-law. She in turn, gets up to serve all in her house.

Then, others in the village who are ill are brought to Jesus. He cares enough about all of them, to touch them at their greatest point of need and heal them. I think that is what Jesus is willing to do for us, to touch us at our greatest point of need.

The next morning, he gets up early to pray. During that prayer he is reminded of his purpose and what he is to be about in life. So when he is found by Simon - who says, "Where you been? People are looking for you. This could be the start of something big for us here."

Jesus simply says, "That's not why I came. It is time for us to go to other towns and villages, to preach, teach and heal there. That is why I came."

But Jesus understands his purpose. He is to be about teaching and serving in the name of the One who created this world and loves this world. *As people of Jesus Christ, we are to be about the purpose of teaching and serving in the name of the One who created this world and loves it too.*

Small groups help us fulfill this purpose. There are many benefits to connecting up with others in a small group. But the main goal of a small group is to help people form a deeper relationship with God, deeper relationships with each other in such a way that helps us be Disciples of Christ.

In addition to gathering together, to read, learn, fellowship and pray together, there is one more important task of a small group. *That is to live our faith in the world.* One of the best ways to do this is for a small group to do some type of mission in the community or in the world together.

In doing a mission project in the world together, we are reminded that we are not supposed to be living for ourselves; we are to be living out loud for Jesus Christ. So that others can come to know the love and grace we have experienced as a gift of God.

Being involved in missions helps us to realize how fortunate we are. Being involved in missions reminds us how dependent upon God we are for life. Being involved in missions reminds us that God invites us to share what we have been given. Being involved in missions reminds us that God wants to work through us to touch the world.

One of my dreams is that every group that meets in our church will do at least one mission project, together, each year. You can even pick the project. You can do what God calls you to. You can be involved in some type of activity that shows God's love and grace.

Last Christmas our Chancel Choir went to several nursing homes, using their gift of music to bring God's grace to people in need. This weekend 29 people from our Confirmation Class are involved in a mission retreat. I would love to see our committees involved in doing a mission project together. I would love to see our Sunday School Classes, involved in a mission project. I would love to see our DISCIPLE Bible Study groups get involved in some type of mission project. It can be anything, where ever you see a need in our world that may just be what God is calling us to respond to.

I am reminded of a woman by the name of Minnie Burgeon. She wasn't looking forward to the rainy season. The year before Minnie had replaced the roof on her home for \$2,000. But it was worse now than before. To make matters worse, the company that did the work did several jobs in her area - mostly for the elderly- and left town right afterwards.

Minnie had no money to get the roof replaced again, so she contacted a local church which had a reputation for matching people in need with

volunteer labor. The timing was bad. It was hot. It was June. Everyone wanted to be swimming and boating, not baking on a rooftop. The youth group volunteered its time and energy for Minnie, but once the group members had spent a few hours tearing shingles off the sweltering roof, their resolve to help others waned.

"Hey, I'm sorry, but I don't think I can stay very long. I've got stuff to do around the house."

"Yeah, I've got a date tonight, and I've gotta do my hair."

"I told a friend I'd meet her at the mall in a little while, so I can't stay long."

The leader knew he had to do something or lose the whole work crew. He brought them downstairs to meet Minnie. She pointed to the water stains above her bed and talked about how she would lie in bed and worry as water dripped on her. Then she said, "Jesus has been good to me to send you Samaritans."

Nobody left. Nobody complained again. They all finished the job and felt great. Minnie was no longer just a "service project." She became a neighbor.

The youth group saw a common need. They saw a human. Friends, I believe God wants to work through us to touch this world. It is happening. It has happened in the past. It is God's desire for it to happen in the future. We are called to be a part of the community of faith, to forge relationships of honor, respect, caring so that together, we can let God work through us.

When we commit to a life of service and serving others in the name of God, we learn to live for more than ourselves. We learn to live for God. And that is when we discover the real joy of living a life of faith.

May God help us live as followers of Jesus Christ.

Amen