

What causes you to be nervous?

As a pastor, there are several things that cause me to be nervous. I get nervous over little things like; will I remember the name of the person who is being baptized? Will I pronounce the name correctly of the person who has died or of a family member of that person?

One of the other things that I get nervous about is having enough. I remember when I first started in ministry. The church was growing. We were getting more and more people in worship. I continued to encourage the person putting together communion to please make more. But, for whatever reason she wouldn't do it.

I would get so nervous, I was even starting to count people in the church to see if we had enough bread or enough cups for juice. I am glad I did, because one month we didn't have enough. I had to have the person assisting me run across the street to my home to get a loaf of bread.

The next month, I am glad I counted, because I had to pour juice from one cup to another cup in order to have enough communion cups to serve everyone who was coming. Those two months of back to back having to fix something with communion so we had enough helped convince the person preparing it to realize that we just needed to prepare more food.

In one of the conversations I had with her, she asked me, "Why is this so important to you?" I said, "Well, aside from the obvious heart attack I almost have when we are in the midst of communion and we don't have enough, for me it is an issue of hospitality."

She said, "What do you mean?"

I said, "If you were visiting here. And you had had a difficult experience with church in your past, how would it make you feel if we ran out of communion, just before you arrived."

She said, "Wow, that wouldn't make me feel too good. It would make me feel as if I really weren't wanted or important."

I just smiled at her. She got it.

What we do in church, how we act in church, how we treat each other, tells the real story of who we are and what we really believe. If we don't have enough communion for everyone, it says that not everyone is important. If we don't find ways to at least smile at each other and welcome each other, it says that we really don't care about others.

In our scripture for today, Jesus is teaching in his home. While he is there, so many people come that we are told there is no more room in the house, not even for one more person.

As I thought about this scripture I found myself wondering what, if any, are the ways in which we might be giving off clues to others that subtly say, we are full; there is no more room here, not even for one person?

When we see someone we don't know do we walk away from them? When someone is beside us, are you willing to look at them? Are you willing to smile at them? Are you willing to greet them? Are you willing to say, "Hi, my name is _____?" Sometimes it is the little things that really display our attitudes.

Occasionally, I will have someone say to me. "But Scott, that is so hard to introduce myself to someone I don't know?" Yes, I know it is for many of us. If a guest came to our home, we wouldn't ignore them. We would smile at them. We would welcome them. We would

let them know by our warmth and hospitality that we were expecting them.

As I see it, for those of us who are members, this is our home. Each week, God sends guests to us right here at church. Most of those guests arrive very apprehensive, afraid they are going to stick out, afraid they are going to be embarrassed. Some have had very painful experiences that have caused them to question God, church or their faith. And they may just be coming here to give it one last try, to see if there is anything at all to this thing called church.

By your welcoming, by your smiling, by your making them feel as if we have been waiting for them, it helps them to relax enough, to worship and possibly to hear a message of hope.

In our scripture for today, Jesus is teaching in a packed house. A man who is paralyzed is brought to him. When they realize they can't get in the door, they go to the roof. They open up the roof so they can lower this man down to Jesus.

I can't even imagine how distracting that must have been for Jesus. How he could preach with a roof being opened up above him, is amazing to me. We are told that when the man was lowered down, Jesus looked up and saw the faith of his friends and said, "Son, your sins are forgiven, pick up your mat and go on your way."

Sometimes, we need others to carry us to God, to help us make it through the challenges and difficulties we face. When I went through a divorce many years ago, I had a friend who called me every week. My sisters also called me each week. Each of these three people stayed connected with me in such a way as to help me understand that they loved me. They believed in me. They cared about me, even when I was wondering if anyone really cared about me.

Their faith, their constancy, their connectedness eventually reminded me that I was not alone. Because they were hanging with me, it helped me to see that God had not abandoned me. Their faith brought me to a place to see and experience God in my life again. So that I could come to a place of believing again, that God cared about me.

Eventually, the man in our story picked up his mat and left, rejoicing and giving thanks to God that he had been touched, that he had been welcomed, that he had been heard.

When you and I in the church invite others to worship, when we welcome guests to worship, when we care about those around us who have struggled, we offer space so God can work in another's life.

May God teach us how to welcome, how to care so that when we bring one who is hurting to Jesus, he can look at us and see our faith and say to the one who is hurting, "Your sins are forgiven, pick up your mat and go on your way."

In the hope Jesus offers us.

Amen