

“Jesus Cares”

John 4:7-19, 25-26, 28-30

Art sat at home and watched the Sunday morning news programs. He looked at the clock and noted that the worship service was just starting. He thought, “It’ll be a cold day in hell when they see me there again.”

When Irene, his wife of 43 years, was diagnosed with cancer, Art had been so worried, there were so many important issues to think about. He hadn’t thought about calling the church. Within two months Irene died and no one from the church ever visited. When he called the church to arrange for the funeral, the pastor was surprised to learn that Irene had been ill. No one contacted Art after the funeral. He had been left alone to grieve the loss of the love of his life.

Since then, Art had missed church 8 Sundays in a row, and no one called to see if he was okay. It was obvious that he could have died too and no one at the church would have given it a second thought.

Art clicked the remote from one television program to another. The church hadn’t missed him when he hadn’t showed up, so he sure wasn’t going back now.

Gretchen sat in her nightgown and stared out the glass doors to the backyard. She sighed as she remembered the swing set that used to set in the middle of the yard and the children who used to play on it. She was so busy during those years, running kids everywhere, doing her duty with the Parent Teacher Organization, and making sure homework got done. At times

Gretchen had dreamed about when the kids would be grown and gone and she could have a life again. Now that time had arrived, and the dream had become a nightmare.

Gretchen saw her reflection in the window and wondered how she had ever reached this predicament. She used to be outgoing and happy all the time. Now she wanted to stay home and hide from the world. She tried praying about her life, asking God for some answers or some help, but when she prayed she felt empty and alone. She didn't believe God heard her prayers anymore. At times she wasn't sure that there was a God

Lana, Sally, Bill, Ken, and Mark are being commissioned as Stephen Ministers to join Divinity's 24 Stephen Minister already commissioned. They will be matched up in one on one care giving relationships with the Art's and Gretchen's of our congregation. They've been coming to training classes on Thursday nights since last September in completing 52 hours of training. In learning and practicing in role plays to talk less and listen more, they are prepared to walk with folks through a crisis and to help people hear and believe that God loves them.

Our Stephen Ministers have learned Art needs someone to care for his deep hurt and anger by listening and reflecting feelings, but that will not be enough. Art's pain had led him to push away not only God's people but also God. Eventually, Art needs to deal with the pain of his grief, and only the hope of the resurrection will be enough to help and heal him.

Our Stephen Ministers have learned how to be a caring presence with Gretchen who is very sad and depressed. She may need to be referred to professional care. She also needs a

renewed sense of meaning and purpose in her life and the assurance that God is there for her, does hear her prayers, and still loves her.

From our Stephen Minister training, I want to share with you seven signs of God's grace in a person's life. Seven ways people are changed when they hear and believe that God loves them. These signs overlap; no one shows these signs perfectly, and everyone will show some of them more than others. But when they are noticeably absent or distorted in a person's life, that person is having trouble hearing and believing that God loves them.

1. **Awareness of God's presence.** Whether you experience God in worship, in Holy Communion, in private meditation or while pondering the majesty of his creation; you have a sense that God is real, that he truly loves you, that he hears your prayers, and that you can count on him to care for you.

In our gospel text, that woman at the well was oblivious to the fact that she was in God's presence, but after Jesus ministered to her, she went and told others that he may be the Messiah.

How did Jesus minister to her? He introduced himself to her, listened to her, answered her questions, accepted her, and related to her in a grace-filled way rather than judging her. Jesus told her the truth about God, the truth about her life, but continued to accept her and care for her.

Jesus encouraged her to seek God even though she felt like an outcast as a Samaritan and a second class citizen as a woman. Jesus gave her hope for the future. She became aware of God's presence in Jesus.

2. **Faith.** Faith is a way of living that demonstrates trust in God. People who hear and believe that God cares tend to live in ways that show that belief. You have confidence because you know God is caring for you. You are able to take risks and embrace change because you already know the final outcome is resurrection and new life.

The woman at the well had faith when she said she knew the Messiah was coming and that he would answer all her questions.

3. **Hope.** To hope is to believe in the possibility of a favorable future; it is the opposite of worry, fear, and despair. Hopeful people live positive and fruitful lives. Hope implies a certain discontent with the way things are and propels us to work for a more desirable, God pleasing future. When we hear and believe the good news about Jesus' resurrection, we hope in God even when all human reasons for hope are gone.

The woman at the well had hope when she saw the possibility of her future being better than her present.

4. **Love.** As the Holy Spirit enables people to hear and believe that God loves them, our response is to love God and one another more deeply. We want to serve the needs of others ahead of self. Love is the energy of the Spirit that empowers us to extend ourselves for the spiritual growth of others as well as ourselves.

5. **Gratitude and Openness to Grace.** We are grateful people. We receive God's love; we receive love from one another without thinking that we earned it. When we ask God

to forgive us, we believe that he does and we don't cling to our guilt. We know that God loves us because of who Jesus is and what he did for us on the cross.

As a result, we live gratefully. We recognize and give thanks for the daily gifts God gives us – from the beauty of a sunrise to holding our newborn baby. We know God cares and we live gratefully.

6. **Repentance and Humility.** When we hear and believe God loves us, we become free to admit our own faults and we turn away from our sins. To repent is to turn back from behaviors that hurt others, damage relationships, or are self-destructive. God's love frees us from slavery to destructive behaviors in order to serve God and care for others. That is true humility.

7. **Community.** The seventh sign of God's grace in a person's life is to understand that God has adopted us in baptism and that we are now part of a very big family. We are in community with all God's other children and with all of humankind. While we maintain our individuality and uniqueness, we don't let it selfishly rule our behavior and relationships. We seek out others with whom to share our gifts, our lives, and our faith.

We feel connected rather than isolated from other people. We enjoy being with others and recognize Jesus' presence in others. We are comfortable with people different from us, knowing that our common connection as God's beloved creations is stronger than any differences. We reach out to other people and care for them because God has first cared for us.

These are seven signs of God's grace in a person's life. Awareness of God's presence. Faith. Hope. Love. Gratitude and Openness to Grace. Repentance and Humility. Community. When these are noticeably absent or distorted in a person's life then we reach out to them in a caring, forgiving, loving, and non-judgmental way. We provide care for people by helping people hear and believe that god loves them. We care because God cares. We care because Jesus cares.

John 4:10-14 . . . ¹⁰Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." ¹¹The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹²Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" ¹³Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

God cares and so do we.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, you have done all that is necessary to care for us – body and spirit. Fill us with your gracious love and give us opportunities to bring your care to others so that they can know the joy of your healing and the peace of your wholeness. Amen.

May the peace of God . . .

Sermon - #581 – You Are Mine

Closing - #574 – Here I Am Lord