

CRIBB<S> NOTES – NOVEMBER 8, 2009

Just when I thought I could get away with doing nothing, somebody walked up and asked me to do something. Sometimes, there is no escape from life's demands. Sitting quietly in the corner and trying not to be seen did not protect me from the intrusion that broke my silence. Hiding behind the newspaper and pretending not to notice the commotion in front of me did not prevent me from being affected by the assault on another person.

We are connected to the unbroken bond that is the human family. Our joys and sorrows are shared and felt by friends and strangers. Events that rupture our peace leave an indelible scar etched deeply into our souls. We cannot ignore or forget moments of profound impressions. They shape us into compassionate and caring sojourners. It is what makes us human.

As human beings, we concern ourselves with the cares of others. We look to see how each of us is doing. We inquire about family members. We want to be assured everything is going well with our neighbors. Indeed, we break our silence and speak up on behalf of those who cannot defend themselves. More is at stake than merely "treating others the way we want to be treated." We become the other.

In a recent conversation with a long time friend, the subject of loving our neighbor came up. He said, "I have been pondering what it means 'to love my neighbor' as myself." He continued, "I have been concentrating on the part that is myself when I realize I am my neighbor or I love my neighbor as my self."

I listened attentively as my friend explained how his interpretation of a familiar biblical passage is helping him to see himself in the faces of other people. This is no small matter. There are numerous instructions in the Bible that remind us to assist strangers, foreigners, and travelers.

According to Scripture, the people of God were once strangers, aliens, foreigners, outsiders and immigrants who depended on the hospitality of others for their survival. Many of us can remember a time when we were far away from home and did not have the resources to be completely self-sufficient. We needed others to help us. Perhaps there were times when nobody came to our aid. We were left alone in a hostile environment without anyone we could depend on to be with us. We felt disconnected.

Placing ourselves in the lives of strangers makes it possible for us to deepen our human capacity. That is the point. Efforts to escape such an encounter deny our true purpose. Human beings are formed as social creatures who require the loving touch of another person. We need affirmation and sometimes approval from others. We need to be comforted and spurred on to accomplish our tasks. We need encouragement. The absence of such can cripple us and weaken our resolve to live as fully as possible.

During our weekly Tuesday night Soul Food Bible study, we touched on Jesus' stern demand to the lame man who came to be healed. Jesus said, "Stand up, take up your mat, and walk." Jesus used powerful words to encourage a broken man to become whole again. Jesus looked past the man's physical limitations and saw his ability to rise up and move. The man needed to see himself for what he was truly capable of doing.

There are some of us who are that lame man. We need to hear encouraging words that will push us to stand up and do what we need to do. Our experiences of disappointment and discouragement can take such a mighty hold on our lives, we forget who we truly are and what we can really do.

We must step outside our comfort zones, put down our newspapers, and get more intimately involved in the lives of our neighbors, friends, and strangers. For a time such as this, we need each other; and others need us. We need to re-form community. We need to love each other and see ourselves in the faces of people who are in need.

This is something we can do. We can do it together by lending helping hands. We truly are connected to the whole human family.

-Pastor Art Cribbs