

"TWO-LEGGED FAITH"*{James 2:14-26}*

Trinity Presbyterian Church

January 20, 2008

I concluded last Sunday's message by asking you to take three action steps with me this past week...

- ✚ ...to pray each day—*"Break my heart with the things that break the heart of God!"*—and don't you dare pray it if you don't mean it!
- ✚ ...to take just 5 minutes to pray for those who are suffering with HIV/AIDS and, if necessary, to alter your attitude towards this pandemic
- ✚ ...to ask God—what would You have me to do?

TALK...TALK...TALK

We can talk ourselves silly...and it seems quite easy in a church/worship setting to find ourselves engrossed in the *"ain't it awful"* attitude and return to *"our world"* a bit disturbed but not enough to get involved. By Monday or Tuesday we forget what we heard on Sunday and go back to what we were before. (We're those *"Huddle Christians"* that Jake Espy described to us several Sundays ago...*{like a football team that gathers in the middle of the field in their huddle...and play is called...and then the team runs for the sidelines and sits on the bench until next week...they never really play the game}*). That is an excellent description of the church today—all talk and little or no action. It takes effort to become involved and it involves moving from our comfort zone into an area that is less comfortable!

The Book of James can really rattle our cages because it's a call to roll up our sleeves and become active and put our lethargy to rest. In 1:22-25, James writes...

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves...do what it says! If you don't obey, you are only fooling yourself. For if you just listen and don't obey, it is like looking at your face in a mirror but doing nothing to improve your appearance. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. But if you keep looking steadily into God's perfect law—the law that sets you free—and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it!"

This is one time that I really like the old King James Translation of that 22nd verse...

"Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves!"

The church is filled with *"fat cats"* who come every Sunday *"to be fed and watered"* and go home and rest until the next feeding. That time must end—and that time is now!

We've walked solely on the FAITH LEG and omitted the WORKS LEG...and our effectiveness has been thwarted by our single-legged approach. That time must end—and that time is now!

In our text this morning we read...

“Dear brothers and sisters, what’s the use of saying you have faith if you don’t prove it by your actions! That kind of faith can’t save anyone...it isn’t enough just to have faith. Faith that doesn’t show itself by good deeds is no faith at all—it is dead and useless. Now, someone may argue, ‘Some people have faith, others have good deeds.’ I say, ‘I can’t see your faith if you don’t have good deeds, but I will show you my faith through my good deeds!’”

Just one more scripture. I've been talking for some months on the subject of “GRACE.” All too frequently we stop short when quoting those familiar passages from Ephesians 2. To understand, the *entire context*, verses 8, 9, and 10 must be read together...

“It is by GRACE you have been saved, THROUGH FAITH—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—NOT BY WORKS, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus TO DO GOOD WORKS, which God prepared in advance for us to do!”

TWO-LEGGED FAITH

God has called us to walk on two legs: FAITH and WORKS...and as believers...and a church...we are functionally handicapped if we're not walking on both legs!

- ...the HIV/AIDS Pandemic demands our attention
- ...we have no alternative but to respond—it can no longer be shoved under the carpet
- ...our calling is to become involved through
 - ...adopting a village
 - ...adopting a church within a village
 - ...underwriting a pastor’s salary
 - ...building adequate facilities
 - ...assisting with education on prevention
 - ...adopting orphans.

We've long been satisfied with what Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls “*cheap grace*”—“*Grace without price...grace without cost!*” Bonhoeffer writes...

“Grace is costly because it calls us to FOLLOW, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ.”

...and dear friends, following Jesus brings with it the promise of a cross...to the uncomfortable road of...

- ...feeding the hungry
- ...giving drink to the thirsty
- ...demonstrating hospitality to the stranger
- ...clothing those in need
- ...caring for the sick

...visiting those in prison

The church—as I said last Sunday—has been largely ignorant of the HIV/AIDS Pandemic—primarily because of myths that have circulated about this disease—or, we’ve just turned our back and ignored the situation. I want to give you ten myths and then the *actual* facts about the disease.

10 MYTHS ABOUT HIV/AIDS

- ✚ **HIV/AIDS IS MOSTLY A DISEASE OF HOMOSEXUAL MEN.** Actually the AIDS virus is primarily spread by heterosexual sex, HIV/AIDS now infects as many women as men worldwide. Although the disease was first recognized in the United States among gay men, it is also significantly spread among IV drug users. Internationally, it is more often a disease of heterosexuals.
- ✚ **HIV/AIDS IS MOSTLY AN AFRICAN PROBLEM.** Found in every country of the world, HIV infections are growing rapidly in countries outside Africa, including India and Russia. *{The Deputy Prime Minister of Russia, Alexander Zhukov, as stated that “the growth of AIDS has gone beyond a medical problem, and has become an issue of strategic, social, and economic security of the country.”}* Many African countries have been decimated by HIV/AIDS, but the impact is also significant in Asia, Eastern Europe, and India which has 5.7 million people living with HIV/AIDS—the highest prevalence in the world!
- ✚ **HIV/AIDS SPREADS MOSTLY BECAUSE OF POOR MORAL CHOICES.** Innocent women are often infected by their husbands. Children most often contract HIV by being born to HIV+ mothers. It isn’t helpful or meaningful to determine who is at fault or who is an innocent victim. *{And, who are we to judge?}*
- ✚ **PLENTY OF MONEY IS BEING SPENT ON FIGHTING HIV/AIDS.** While a great deal of money is being spent by governments, private organizations, and individuals to fight HIV/AIDS, much more is needed—especially from the church.
- ✚ **HIV/AIDS IS NO LONGER A PROBLEM IN THE UNITED STATES.** Because medications *{Antiretrovirals or ARV’s}* are widely available in the United States, the death rate has decreased—people are living longer. But the number of people living with HIV/AIDS in the United States has *NOT* decreased and the rate of new infections is not declining.
- ✚ **ARV’S ARE WIDELY AVAILABLE.** While antiretrovirals are becoming more available, they are still difficult to find in many

rural areas and in some countries. Both drugs and systems to distribute them are needed in many poor countries. *{That's where the church can indeed become involved!}*

- ✚ **A CURE EXISTS FOR HIV/AIDS.** While **there are treatments to prolong life, there is no cure.** Many scientists are working on a cure but few believe there will ever be one way to effectively cure someone because the virus constantly changes and new strands surface.
- ✚ **THERE IS NO HOPE FOR THOSE WITH HIV/AIDS.** Great progress is being made in treatments and the rate of infant infection in some countries is dropping rapidly. There is also a dropping rate of new infections in many countries with strong prevention programs. The church provides hope as it increasingly becomes engaged with education!
- ✚ **IF I'M NOT HIV+, THE DISEASE DOESN'T AFFECT ME.** The high rate of HIV/AIDS infections is causing instability in many countries and reversing the progress made in development. It is also causing a worldwide tuberculosis pandemic. **Every church is affected.** A pandemic affects everyone even if not immediately recognized.
- ✚ **THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO.** Everyone can do something! First, become educated. Second, help teach others about this awful scourge. Third, begin to care and pray about how you personally...and how our church can become involved. Begin to **give yourself and your resources to stopping the spread of AIDS by caring for orphans and those infected and affected by this terrible pandemic.**

CONCLUSION

Solomon wrote in the 72nd Psalm—

"Let the poor always be treated fairly...help defend the poor...rescue the children of the needy...rescue the poor when they cry out...help the oppressed, who have no one to defend them...feel pity for the weak and the needy...and rescue them...save them from oppression and from violence...their lives are precious to God!"

In the next two Sunday's I'm going to be making some major proposals to you—members and friends of Trinity Presbyterian Church. Your response will determine how involved we will become—whether we put our faith into action...whether we demonstrate our faith by our deeds...whether we subscribe to cheap grace of costly grace.

I am convinced that **this is one of the largest challenges the Church of Jesus Christ has ever faced.** It is a world-wide pandemic that will only get worse. God made us as sexual beings and this disease will spread to

many through sexual activity who are totally unaware of that they are HIV positive; therefore, **there is a GREAT need for education on prevention.**

Muslims are quite blunt that they will NOT get involved. They believe that HIV/AIDS is the result of disobedience to the laws of God which provokes His wrath: *“The prophet Mohammed said that when sexual depravity and all that it brings with it manifests itself in a society, that society brings God’s punishment down upon itself!”* They totally ignore other ways that the disease is transmitted: blood transfusions, mother-child transmission, etc.

Contrary to the Muslim tendency, the church cannot consider AIDS as punishment of God, for the God of the Bible is a ***“merciful God who does not seek the death of the sinner but rather that he should repent!”*** That does not negate the fact that God gave free choice to men and women who thus alone remain responsible for their acts and their consequences!

Here’s what I’m going to ask of you today:

- ✚ Repeat the same exercises and commitment made last Sunday
- ✚ Consider making a commitment to join an HIV/AIDS Task Force Study Group with the goal of learning as much of the subject as possible on this pandemic and seeking ways to get involved. If you’re willing to do that, I want you to take a registration card from the chair in front of you, put your name, telephone, and email address on it and write: “Study Group.” I challenge this group will come up with some pilot projects for our church and make recommendations in the near future for our total involvement.
- ✚ In an effort to be informed, you can receive a daily update from the Kaiser Health Network that I urge you to explore. Go to www.kff.org and click on HIV/AIDS under topics. Add your name to their newsletter list.
- ✚ If you want more data, go to www.data.org.
- ✚ As you pray this week ask God to do the following in your life...
 - **Increase your Awareness**
 - **Adjust your Attitude**
 - Release your fears, stigma, and ignorance
 - To fill you with compassion, a heart of love
 - **Make you willing to take action**

“We’re a small church,” you say, *“What can we do?”* Let me respond by saying, **Jesus changed the whole world with 12 individuals...**I think He can do the same today with you and me if we step out using both legs! *“Little is much in God’s hands!”*