

Example

Shepherding Series 6/8

August 4, 2013

2 Corinthians 3:1-18

¹ Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Surely we do not need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you or from you, do we? ² You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all; ³ and you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. ⁴ Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. ⁵ Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, ⁶ who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. ⁷ Now if the ministry of death, chiseled in letters on stone tablets, came in glory so that the people of Israel could not gaze at Moses' face because of the glory of his face, a glory now set aside, ⁸ how much more will the ministry of the Spirit come in glory? ⁹ For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, much more does the ministry of justification abound in glory! ¹⁰ Indeed, what once had glory has lost its glory because of the greater glory; ¹¹ for if what was set aside came through glory, much more has the permanent come in glory! ¹² Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, ¹³ not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. ¹⁴ But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. ¹⁵ Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; ¹⁶ but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

Week six of our SHEPHERDing series! This series has been a lot of learning and exploring creative understandings of how we serve in the church as Shepherds and Sheep. I am excited about today's sermon "Example".

I want to share with you this story by M. Webber, from Chicken Soup for the Christian Soul.

"Can you be ready in 15 minutes?" it was my friend Bardy on the telephone. "I need your help. I'll be by to pick you up in my car."

"Where are we going?" I asked. "What should I wear?"

"It really doesn't matter. You'll see. Or I should say I'll see." Her infectious laughter crackled across the telephone lines, then the dial tone alerted me that she assumed my willingness to accompany her on some secret mission. If my hunch was correct, she was probably already out the door, in her car, and headed in my direction.

For what? I had learned not to try to second-guess my friend. Bardy is the most interesting person I know—and the most unpredictable. She had always wanted to be a registered nurse, so she went back to school and became one when she was 63 years old. "The real fun started when I graduated," Bardy had informed me. "When I applied for jobs, I was told, 'We retire people at your age, Mrs. Bardarson, we don't hire them!'"

Disappointed but not discouraged, Bardy told God that is he didn't want her sidelined, he'd have to help her find her niche. She continued to apply for nursing positions and was finally hired by a retirement home. She was an instant

hit with the residents. When they talked with her about their aches and pains, they found a sympathetic ear. After all, she had many of those aches and pains herself. They could tell she loved her work and that she was genuinely concerned for them. When she did retire at age 70, the residents gave her the biggest party in the history of the retirement home.

Soon Bardy was at my front door. "I'm driving today," she announced. "Jump in the passenger's seat."

"Where are we going?" I queried as I locked the front door of my house.

"It doesn't matter," she replied with a Cheshire grin on her face. "Marilyn, you know I had to retire from nursing when it became too much for me to lift the patients. Now I've found a new job. I'm going to travel with blind tourists. I'll get to go to all the places I've wanted to see. I'll be helping others, and I'll even get paid for it! Now I need you to help me prepare. Close your eyes while I drive."

I Complied.

"Are your eyes closed? Good!" Bardy said. "I have to practice." She began to describe the scenery of the Seattle streets as she would to a blind tourist. From time to time she would interrupt herself to ask me, "Could you picture that? Was I clear? Did I make sense? Do I sound condescending?"

That day I saw Seattle in a new way. I learned one of Bardy's secrets as well. What makes her such an interesting person is her determination to wear out, not rust out. –The end.

Powerful thought is it not? To wear out, not rust out. To be that sort of example to our fellow believers. As I was editing through this I happened to glean a picture posted by a friend on Facebook the quote said "some people are hurting so bad you have to do more than preach a message to them. You have to be a message to them." Paul himself writes in our scripture today that "you yourselves are our letters of recommendation, written on your hearts to be known and read by all men [sic]; and you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts."

Paul in this scripture is claiming that we are, as we walk, talk and live in and through the body of believers, a letter of recommendation. Our very lives shine out as an example of Christ, an example of Christian living. Our scripture is sharing with us some simple truths about being an example of Christian living, an example of our church, and an example of a Shepherding life. Paul initially writes this because during his time to be able to speak and given any sort of credentials one did have to have a letter of recommendation, similar to what we have today. The other religious leaders of the time were trying to claim that these letters had the highest authority.

Have you ever gotten a letter of recommendation? Or had to write one? A letter that instills confidence in another of your particular skills. If it has been a while since you have done a job search it might not be on your radar but right now letters of recommendation are a big deal. Who ever writes it matters, and how it is written matters, and how it is perceived matters. As Shepherds and as sheep we need be aware of what our letters, which if you are keeping track is actually our very lives, we need to be aware of what those letters are saying and doing and being because they really do matter.

Paul also in this work is discounting the written words of recommendation. You know the saying "Actions speak louder than words." That is essentially what Paul is drawing his recommendations from that his actions through the Spirit given by God speak louder and mean more than any document can. This scripture also focuses on the amazing and transforming nature of the Spirit of God which is evident when accepted and believed in by us as followers of Christ. The Spirit of the Lord transforms us and changes us to be more Christ like to be examples of Christ on Earth. We simply **are** the example of Christ, whether as Shepherds, Sheep, or simply followers of Jesus.

This week our Vacation Bible School has been happening. As you heard in our wonderful song during Children's Moment we learned a lot about standing strong for God and being with one another as a Disciples of Christ community in Greenville. Four churches gathered together to be an example to those wonderful youth and to our community.

I got to see a lot of recommendations for Christ this week in the faces of our Adults who helped make VBS a success. You see as odd as it might sound it is easier for us to be good around Children over our contemporaries. Well, in reality that is not very odd at all is it? It is a fact. We can be on our best behavior because innately we see how like sponges children are. So we love God, we act crazy, we patiently and gently keep them in line. We are the wonderful and positive examples to them that we can be.

Yet to be an example to Kids is not enough, it is a good starting place but it is not a good stopping point. We have to challenge ourselves to be an example to our colleagues, our contemporaries, those older and younger than ourselves adults. Now as adults we do not often view examples well, we look at others and say wow they are awesome and automatically decide we could not be like that so why bother.

Why bother, because as Paul states we are our own letters of recommendation. Why bother, because little ones have big ears and eyes and absorb a lot that we do not even realize. Why bother, because we are followers of Christ and that should be enough.

Pray with me please, God open our hearts, open our minds, open us to be the best that we can be. Open us to be your examples, your recommendations, your letters of reverence. Help us through the lives we live point the way to you, through all we do compel us to show and share your amazing love. Amen.