

Pastor Eric's sermon
May 6, 2018

"Not A Burden" – 1 John 5: 1-5

I read this passage and was reminded of something that happened 25 years ago. I preached a sermon about two experiences I had that week, what I call *a gift week* with multiple opportunities to be in ministry and mission. The first involved my ministering to someone who we would describe as being marginalized. He had taken the wrong bus and was far from home and needed help finding a way home.

The other involved a mother, with two children, who needed a safe place as they waited for help to arrive. In that sermon, I said something about how my interactions in both situations had offered a glimpse of the kingdom to another. They had also enriched my life and faith, my connection to God and neighbor. On the way out of church, a parishioner and friend, Bill (not his real name) said, *Can I stop by and talk to you tomorrow? I have a story to tell you.* I said, *Of course.*

I need to tell you something about Bill, who along with his family, were active in the church. Bill did not consider himself a traditional Christian. There was a lot he did not believe, but he took very seriously Jesus' teachings, what today's scripture refers to as *God's commandments*. For him, living by them was not a burden because they made life and the world a better place.

On Monday, Bill stopped by and told me about something that had happened to him five years earlier, which would have been 30 years ago. At that time, he lived in Massachusetts and was on his way home from a business trip. He stopped in one of the rest areas on Route 90, where he was approached by a young man. The young man was hungry, and he wanted money to buy something to eat. Bill said, *I won't give you money, but I will buy you a meal.* The young man accepted Bill's offer.

While they ate, Bill tried to learn the young man's story. The young man was very reluctant to share. When they finished, Bill asked the young man where he was headed. The young man said *home*. Bill found out the young man was going in his direction. He lived beyond where Bill was going, so, Bill offered to drive him as far he was going. As they drove, the young man began to tell his story. He was just out of high school, and he and his father had a falling out. It had been a bad fight, as they say in New England, "a wicked fight." In frustration, he had run away. He now realized he had made a terrible mistake and was on his way home. He was scared and unsure of what would happen because he had said some nasty things to his parents that he now regretted. Bill listened to the young man's story. He thought for a moment and said, *Change of plans. I am driving you home.* The more they drove, the more they talked -- the young man about his family, his hopes and dreams, and Bill about his life, his family, mistakes he had made, and life in general.

Time passed and before they realize, Bill was asking how to get from the highway to the young man's house. They pulled up to the house, and the young man froze. Bill asked, *Do you want me to go to the door with you?* The young man responded, *Will you?* Bill said, *Let's go.* They walked up to the house, and the young man rang the doorbell. The father answered the door, saw his son, began to cry and greeted his son with a warm, loving embrace. Then he looked at Bill, who asked if he may come in for a minute. The father called to his wife who came down the stairs and crying, embraced her son.

Bill explained who he was and told the story of why he was there. He said, *Obviously, you want to talk, so I will excuse myself.* As he stood to leave the father said, *Let me walk you out.* At the door, the father thanked Bill, shook his hand and tried to give him money. Bill responded, *Not necessary.* Father said, *How about your gas? You went out of your way. It was an inconvenience. Let me do something.* With tears in his eyes, the father said, *How can I ever thank you for returning our son to us!*

Bill responded. *Sir, I have a son. I also have a father. I know it is not always easy. I have had run-ins with my dad, and I imagine I will have them with my son. If what happened to you, happened to me, I'd like to hope that someone would do the same. You want to thank me. Some day you will run across a person in need. Spend the money you want to give me to help them. I will pray for your family.*

As Bill and I talked he told me. *Eric, in reflecting on what you said yesterday I wish I had said, 'I simply did this because it is what God desires us to do. I wish I said that because that is what I believe.'*

Too often we think *obeying God's commandment to love* is a burden. The truth is, it is not. It can be an inconvenience. It can be challenging, and it can stretch us. Chances are it will make us uncomfortable as we are forced to move out of our comfort zones. All of these are reasons why we may think of it as a burden, but it really is not a burden.

Obeying God's commandment to love is an opportunity. An opportunity to offer, receive and experience a glimpse of the kingdom. It is an opportunity to interact with and get to know someone with whom we may not normally interact. It is also an opportunity to know ourselves better, as we experience God's transforming love.

Matt read these words from this morning's scripture, *for whatever is born of God conquers the world.* It conquers the world out there. It also conquers the world that resides in you, me, and everyone with whom we interact as we journey through life.