

January 28-29, 2012 – Over the Fence Series

Title: *Reach Out*

Theme: *More often than not, faith is caught – not taught – through relationship. Genuine friendships are bridges to faith.*

Texts: John 15:12-17

Notes on the Text:

This text is part of a much larger section of John that begins at the Last Supper after Judas has left the table. Knowing that he doesn't have much time left with his disciples Jesus pours out his heart to them, seeking to equip them and comfort them. If you own a "red letter" bible you'll notice that most of chapters 14-17 are red. But the section actually begins at 13:31 where Jesus sounds the core theme that runs through this section: love. The Father's love for the Son, the Son's love for the Father, the Son's love for the disciples and the disciples' love for one another are all interconnected throughout this discourse.

Chapter 15 begins with the topic of abiding. The disciples are to abide in Jesus just as a branch abides in the vine. While the "how to" of abiding is never laid out the result of this abiding is: fruit...and the most precious fruit of all is love. Love will define the life of the disciples who stay connected to Jesus and his word. In 13:34-35 Jesus introduced the "new" commandment to love, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." Now in 15:12 picks up the same theme. Disciples are called to love as Jesus loved – completely, unconditionally, and sacrificially. In this passage we are specifically called to love one another in the body of Christ, but that love is also commanded for our neighbors and enemies.

Normally the relationship between Rabbi and disciples was one of superior to inferiors, but Jesus does not treat his disciples as servants. He not only shares with them his heart but his plans as well. And he affirms that their relationship is predicated, not upon their choice of Jesus but his choice of them.

Preaching Possibilities

Last week in the *Over the Fence* series we talked about where to find people whom God may be calling us to reach. If God has opened our eyes to see the opportunities all around us, to no longer see scenery or objects but people whom God created, then it's time to take the next step: build a friendship. And that process almost always begins with conversation. So...how do you strike up a conversation with someone new? Swen has shared with us a tool developed by Tentmakers called "The Conversation Stack" and it looks like this:

Nameplate- *a person's name is the sweetest sound to them in the world.* Learn their name and use it.

House- *"Where do you live?" "Where are you from?" "Tell me about your family"*

Airplane- *"Where have you been? Where are you going over spring break?" "What are you doing this summer?"*

Tennis Racquet- *“What do you do for fun?...sports, hobbies?”*

Lightbulb- *“What are your ideas...thoughts?” How do you feel about...?”*

PFC- Imagine if you will a Private First Class soldier at attention...stands for Problems, Frustrations and Concerns *“Do you have any problems, frustrations or concerns?”* This goes a little deeper into who they are...

Trophy- *“What are your accomplishments?”* Perhaps you have heard something along the way you can pick up on...or simply ask what is your greatest achievement?”

Flowers- shower them with *compliments along the way*. Make sure they are sincere.

Praying Hands- If it lends itself...offer to *pray with/for the person*. This is the ultimate form of conversation as we include God into it. If it doesn't seem right to pray together...be in prayer throughout the whole conversation that God is at work through you.

While conversation is the doorway to friendship, it is only the doorway. Genuine friendship requires a commitment of time and intentionality. Our purpose is not to convert anyone, but to simply love people where they are. We express that love through:

- Acceptance** – God isn't done with them yet, but loves them anyway. We can too.
- Genuine kindness** – the little things like offering to drive them to the airport or sending a card when times are tough,
- Affirmation** – reflecting back to people the gift that God created them to be,
- Authenticity** – being yourself and only yourself
- Transparency** – revealing your struggles and frustrations when appropriate, which helps people to be “real” with you, and
- Forgiveness** – in genuine friendship we will step on each other's toes!

These simple but profoundly powerful building blocks help us to develop genuine friendships in which people begin to trust and open up. In my experience, more often than not these friendships eventually provide opportunity for spiritual conversation. One day your friend will, in one way or another, ask you about the hope that is in you. The next week we'll talk about that golden moment!