

Sermon: 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – Disability Awareness Sunday

Text: Romans 12:9-21 (13a, 16b)

Theme: Deeds of Mercy

Goal: To raise awareness about any kind of disability, showing mercy as Jesus showed mercy to all,

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Paul spoke in the preceding paragraph about different gifts God gave us to serve Him and to serve our neighbour. This was the text of last Sunday and we preached about it. The last gift mentioned is mercy: “If it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully” (Romans 12:8). *Those with this gift are sensitive to the needs of other members of the community, particularly those who are suffering in some way* (ABC 1369). It seems now in our text that Paul is explaining how we can practice mercy. True mercy is not just about emotion and sentiment; true mercy is something that we must learn to practise. It’s a matter of identifying ourselves with others, with their needs.

Several short instructions are given about relationship. We can link this list of instructions to the theme of this Sunday: Disability Awareness Sunday, and see what we are already doing and what can be done to improve our acts of mercy. As children of God redeemed by the blood of Jesus, we are called by God to let His Light shine through our behaviour. People around us cannot see our faith, or see God, but they can see our deeds as fruit of our faith. This is what Paul is talking about.

I – What does it mean to have a disability?

I have a sight disability. Without glasses I’m lost. I feel that I’m having a hearing disability; especially my left ear bothers me. My legs don’t

obey me anymore like when I was young. Am I a disabled person? In a general sense, yes, I am. Each of us, when we lose any ability we once had, become disabled in that respect. A disabled person is not just someone in a wheelchair, a blind, a deaf... as it is commonly understood. Certainly those are the most vulnerable disabled people. But: Think about what are you losing? Maybe your memory is becoming weaker, like an old computer. Maybe you cannot support loud music and noise anymore like when you were teenager. Maybe you are not sleeping as well as you used to.

It is important to enlarge our vision about what disability means to grow in our awareness about disability. It will help to open our eyes and our hearts to the different needs of people around us.

II – What is our reaction to any disability?

Usually we compare ourselves to others to measure if I am in a better or in a worse position. Some people like to make themselves victims, complaining about what the others have and they don't have; or about what they have lost. But I think the most common behaviour is to compare ourselves to others to see how better I am than the other. Isn't it so? Or am I wrong?...

Let's just see some situations of people who are different than me: I am healthy...the other is sick; I am wealthy... the other is poor; I am young...the other is old; I have good eyesight... the other is blind; I am educated... the other cannot even read. – If we despise people who are in different situation than we are, it is like the Pharisee in the temple looking down to the tax collector and praying, “I thank you, God, that I am not like this tax collector...” (Luke 18:11).

Paul says: “Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.” “People of low position” are

not only those who are unschooled, poor or outcast of the society. Anyone who is not like me, and lacks some ability that I have, can be considered as someone in a lower position than me. This guideline is very important because some people even don't like to talk to or to touch some kind of disabled people. Sometimes our reaction is to avoid those people because we don't know how to handle them, or we feel uneasy and embarrassed.

Always consider what our reaction would be if someone despised us because of some disability we have! *“Don't do to others what you don't like for yourself, but love your neighbour as yourself.”*

Last week I read a report of a Social Entity that works in a township in Cape Town (Wallacedene : Teach, Love, Care Network). A Brazilian friend works with this entity run by his wife Lorna. It's about dignity. They organized a day called “Women, be worthy”. They called together several homeless women and gave them an opportunity to have a warm shower, to get their clothes washed and to receive new ones, to get some hygienic products, to eat a good soup and to have some good chat. I really liked this experience.

III – How does God care of disabled people?

When we look to Jesus' ministry, we see that He had a special care for disabled people. He even said to the Pharisees about His ministry: “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick” (Luke 5:31). He was not speaking about disabled people (strictly speaking), but about his new disciple Matthew, who was a tax collector and an outcast of the Jewish religious society. But the general principle of Jesus helps us to understand His behaviour helping anyone in need, and healing the deaf, the lame, the leper and the blind.

God even chose Moses, a speech defected person, to be His great leader. Moses had tried to excuse himself when he was called by God: “O Lord, I have never been eloquent... I am slow in speech and tongue. The Lord said to him: Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go: I will help you to speak and will teach you what to say” (Exodus 4:10-12). And we know what a great leader Moses was. – The Ap. Paul had sight problems and also relied on a secretary to write his letters; he only signed them.

No one who has any kind of disability should say: This is a curse of God; or: I am a disabled, God despised me. No! The love of God through Jesus Christ is for all! And we have to highlight for those people the high regard and love Jesus had for disabled people. The Psalmist confesses: “Though my father and my mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me” (Psalm 27:10).

Conclusion: Disability Awareness Sunday shall open our eyes and our hearts to opportunities to be with those who lack any kind of ability. Think about someone of your relationship: an elderly person, someone in wheelchair, someone suffering of a psychological disturbance, a lonely... What can I do? How can I help? Some people need just someone to sit with them, listen to them, and give them a hug...

Read the text of Romans 12 slowly again at home. It's on the last E-Bulletin and you will receive it with the sermon tomorrow morning. Go through all the short instructions, analyse your life and your behaviour as a Christian, ask for forgiveness for your lack of love for disabled people, and try to do it better with the help of the Holy Spirit. You will be blessed and more disabled people will be happy. Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, 31 August 2014