September 4, 2022 What are you serving?

1 Peter 4:7-11

The end of everything has come. Therefore, be self-controlled and clearheaded so you can pray. Above all, show sincere love to each other, because love brings about the forgiveness of many sins. Open your homes to each other without complaining. And serve each other according to the gift each person has received, as good managers of God’s diverse gifts. Whoever speaks should do so as those who speak God’s word. Whoever serves should do so from the strength that God furnishes. Do this so that in everything God may be honored through Jesus Christ. To him be honor and power forever and always. Amen.

God bless the reading the hearing and the understanding of the scripture

**Thanks be to God.**

Video:

The Simple Secret to Happiness | Ryan Estis Inspirational Video | Goalcast

*Public speaker, Ryan Estis, shares his experience of having coffee at an airport on Christmas Eve.*

 I will *never* forget that cup of coffee. Well, a couple years ago I was traveling when my schedule worked out on Christmas Eve. I thought the airport was going to be a zoo, so I got there a couple of hours early. It wasn’t. It wasn’t crowded at all. And so, for me, that means coffee.

 So, I get down to my terminal, terminal D, and I see the green sign. And it’s my turn to order. And I was greeted with this very warm and sincere welcome. This woman said, “Hi, my name is Lily, what is your name?”

 I said, “I’m Ryan.”

 She said, “Ryan, what can I make for you today?”

 I said, “Well, I want a Grande pumpkin spice latte.”

 She said, “You want whipped cream on that, don’t ya?”

 I said, “Yeah! Yeah, I want the whipped cream.”
 She said, “I tell you what I’m gonna do. I’m gonna make it extra hot, load it up with whipped cream, sprinkle a little nutmeg on top, that’s how I like it, you’re gonna *love* it.”

 I said, “It sounds great.”

 She said, “Where are you going?”

 I said, “Cleveland.”

 She said, “Are you going back to Cleveland to spend the holiday with your family?”
 I said, “Yes.” Now at this point I start looking around for the camera, right? I mean I’m trying to get a latte. So, I move down the line and the conversation continues. And she’s funny. She’s asking me questions about my family and about our holiday traditions. She’s laughing and I’m laughing.

And she hands me my drink and she says to me, “Ryan, have a safe trip back to Cleveland. Go create some extraordinary memories with your family. When you come back through the Minneapolis airport, I want you to stop here and tell me *all* about it.”

 It’s like, I get my drink and I start walking away, and I stop, and I look back at this woman and I think to myself: you know it’s Christmas Eve, most people would rather be anywhere else in the world, than serving coffee in an airport. Not her. It was like she was meant to be there. And I couldn’t help myself, I had to go back. So I went back and I said, “Excuse me, Lily.”

 You know and she jumps around, “Ryan, is everything ok with the latte?”

 “No,” I said, “the latte is perfect. I just had to come back and ask you what is your secret to making such meaningful connections over serving coffee?”

 Well, she corrected me, she said, “Ryan, I’m not serving coffee.”

 I said, “Ok, what are you doing?” (with a chuckle)

 She had thought about this. She had thought about this. And what she told me was, “I’m pouring happiness into people’s lives.”

 I said, “You’re pouring what?” Like, what is pouring happiness? And her definition of pouring happiness: she wants to be happy in her life. She wants to be around happy people, she cares about her customers, and she wants them to come back. So, she chooses, even on Christmas Eve, to smile, to have fun, to help people to just be happy.

 You know, it’s interesting when I met Lily, she would have had no way of knowing this, but I, ahhh, was pretty heavy in the heart and had a lot on my mind. My parents, both retired schoolteachers, married for 45 years. About three months before that holiday, I got a call from mom, we got some really tough medical news about dad. It was a terminal diagnosis, and we knew we were probably not going to have a lot of time.

 So, I was sitting at that airport on Christmas Eve, not in the best place in the world. I will *never* forget that cup of coffee.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qxrNCRhxgho>

Message

Even in an airport on Christmas Eve, Lily was serving happiness. The question is, what are you serving? Or for that matter, what are we serving as a church? Because the reality is wherever and whenever you show up, you are serving something. We are either contributing in serving a positive experience, or we are detracting by serving them a negative experience, because few things are neutral. And how we show up has an impact one way or another.

 Today’s reading is about hospitality and the secret to good hospitality is serving love. The writer emphasizes the need to “love each other as if your life depended on it.” I like how the Common English Bible puts it, “Above all show sincere love to each other,” why? “[B]ecause love covers up a multitude of sins.”

Wait, how does love cover a multitude of sins? This statement certainly is not saying that sins are excused by love. Rather the point seems to be, that love, which is the manifestation of faith, is a sign of our move from the old ego-driven self, to the new spirit-driven self, marked by sobriety, faith, and love. What does that look like? It all boils down to selfless hospitality.

1 Peter 4:9 tells us to, “Open [our] homes to each other.” Hospitality was so important back in the day. It meant offering food and lodging to those traveling. This was an important Jewish virtue, long before Jesus entered the scene. For example, Abraham’s receiving of travelers in Genesis 18 (2-5) was evidence of his virtue, and Job protests his own virtue by saying, “The stranger has not lodged in the street; I have opened my doors to the traveler.” (Job 31:32) The main idea was that the traveler was away from their family and clan and therefore vulnerable.

The same could be said for someone who comes to our church for the first time. They say that the majority of first-time guests attend church because they have experienced a major transition or trauma. There is a good chance that the first time they walk into the building they are feeling a bit vulnerable. They don’t know anybody, they don’t know where to go, they don’t know where to sit, and what if they have to go to the bathroom? What do we do to help them feel more comfortable?

We serve them love, by welcoming them, but the scripture reading also notes, that we welcome them without complaining. That is, we are to be authentically positive with the people we meet, without complaining. Without complaining? Seriously? . “What if I get to the church and the coffee is cold?... what if the coffee is too hot?” “What if I come into worship and I don’t know or like the congregational song we are singing, or worse… what if, I walk into the sanctuary, and someone is sitting in my pew?”

I mean how am I supposed to welcome, without complaining? How am going to be authentically positive, if I am not happy? Isn’t that fake? Not if you do some serious reframing. Reframing is a way of viewing and experiencing events, ideas, concepts and emotions to find more useful alternatives. It affects our attitudes so we can go the extra mile.

A great example of reframing is in the song “The Greatest” by Kenny Rogers. The lyrics tell the story of a little boy who takes a ball and bat to pitch himself some baseball. Each time the boy tossed the ball up, he swung at it and missed. Despite his apparent “failure” each time he misses, he says the affirmation, “I am the greatest player.” Of course, by the third time he does this, it is strike three, you’re out. One would expect the boy to become negative, perhaps even give up on his dream of being the greatest. But instead, he saw it as proof that he was the greatest, saying, “I am the greatest that is a fact… but even I didn’t know I could pitch like that.” The boy didn’t have to give up the dream of being a great baseball player because he reframed his experience.

 Reframing is a practical and valuable tool to shift perception, including one’s own perception of self or even others’ perception of themselves. This is important because it keeps our egos from getting in the way of sharing authentically positive hospitality. Jesus did this all the time. The religious leaders were constantly trying to trick him, did he get all bent out of shape and grouchy? No, he forced his questioners to reframe the situation, so that the knit picking didn’t get in the way of Jesus’ ministry.

 One day the religious leaders questioned why his disciples were plucking the grain from fields on the Sabbath. Plucking grain was basically harvesting, and harvesting was work, and the law said there was to be no work on the Sabbath. Jesus reframed their understanding of the law, saying, “The Sabbath was made for humankind, not humankind for the Sabbath.” (Mark 2:27) The religious leaders saw resting as serving the law, but the law was created to serve humanity, so they would have the energy to work for God the other six days. Those grains of wheat gave them the nourishment to do that.

 Then there was the time the legal expert came to Jesus, asking about eternal life, answered his own question that it was about loving God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself, but then went onto asked Jesus the question, “Who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29) This was an important question, after all, you wouldn’t want to waste your time, energy, and resources on someone who is not your neighbor right?

Jesus ended up recounting a story, we commonly call the Good Samaritan, which incidentally was another oxymoron in the mind of a first century Judean, because they absolutely hated Samaritans. The story is found in Luke 10:25-37 and basically about how a man was beaten, robbed and left for dead alongside the road. Three men passed by him, and of all the people, it was only the Samaritan who stopped to help the man.

Interestingly enough, the original question was, “who is my neighbor?” and Jesus ends with asking the legal expert, not who his neighbor was, but “[Who] was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” (Luke 10:36) Jesus is reframing the man’s understanding, of what it means to love one’s neighbor. The question is not so much who my neighbor is, rather who can I be a neighbor to, because God calls us to be a neighbor to everybody. Including the person who sits in your pew.

Authentic positivity is reframing the situation that might be seen as a negative and seeing that it from a more positive side. A great example of this in the church, is what I heard when I was doing my field education in Sun Prairie. Sun Prairie United Methodist Church had a Wednesday children’s program called LOGOS. Well, the meals, the crafts and the games, were taking a toll on the carpeting in fellowship hall, and it needed to be replaced.

Some people were feeling negative about it, thinking, “Oh no. the carpet is a mess.” The finance people were like, “Oh no, how are we going to pay for new carpet?” I loved hearing what the Associate Pastor, Susan Bresser said, “Wow! Isn’t it great what God is doing? Isn’t it great that we have so many children and young families that we must replace the carpet?” She reframed their understanding of the carpet by taking the focus off of the negative, that it was dirty, tattered, and the cost to replace it, and put it on the positive, the lives that were being changed by this vibrant ministry.

How do we practice authentic positivity? We do what the Apostle Paul wrote to the church of Philippi, “if anything is excellent and if anything is admirable, focus your thoughts on these things,” (Philippians 4:8a) a first century spin on the 1940’s hit Ac-Cent-Tchu-Ate the Positive. You know this a lot of things happen in work and in our lives that are beyond our sphere of influence and control. But we decide how we show up in life. When you decide to show up consistently as the best version of who you are it gives you the best opportunity to meet people where they are. And you never know when someone needs you to be your best.

Christmas Eve at the Minneapolis Airport, a barista named Lily, made a cup of coffee that Ryan Estis will never forget. And it wasn’t the whipped cream, it wasn’t even the nutmeg sprinkled on top, it was because of how Lily decided to show up. Ryan saw her as someone serving coffee, but Lily saw a much bigger picture of herself.

She didn’t see herself as someone who was stuck serving coffee on Christmas Eve, no she reframed that idea. She saw herself as someone serving happiness, by taking her the focus off of herself and placing it on the people she was serving.

The question remains, What are you serving? Because no matter where you show up, you are serving something. You have little control of your circumstances but you do have the power to decide how you show up.

Let us pray…

Next Steps

○ I will ponder/memorize/meditate on, Philippians 4:8a… if anything is excellent and if anything is admirable, focus your thoughts on these things.

○ I will serve authentic positivity by reframing my experience.

○ I will invite someone to come to worship next week: Live and in person at 833 3rd Street, 9:00 am, Facebook Premier 9:00 am CT, available on YouTube at 9:00 am, and Reedsburg TV, channel 11.1 at 3:30 pm.

○ I will read/meditate on 2 Corinthians 3:12-18 in preparation for next Sunday’s worship.

○ I will continue to support RUMC through monetary gifts by mail 833 3rd Street, Reedsburg, WI 53959, or through our website reedsburgunitedmethodistchurch.org, or text my contributions to 855-963-3691

○ I will email my joys/concerns/God sightings to RUMprayer identifying if I would like them to be passed on to the electronic prayer chain.

○ I will pray the new Breakthrough Prayer daily at 8:33 am and 8:33 pm.

All loving God it is by your grace we thrive.

Continue guiding us in using your Spirit

to boldly move us in fulfilling your purposes.

We name it! We claim it, in Jesus’ name. Amen.