

TOUCHING OTHER PEOPLE'S LIVES

I had a busier schedule than usual last week as a pastor. A pastor's week always becomes busier when they are asked to do a funeral. Last week I had a funeral on Thursday as well as on Friday. The Thursday funeral was for a person who had a connection to the church many years ago. The Friday one however, was for somebody I had met at McDonald's several years ago.

When I first started ministering here, I used to go to McDonald's on Stanley Street four days a week and work while I enjoyed a few cups of coffee. I became a regular there and people would see me at a booth with my Bible open usually writing a sermon. I called it my coffee shop ministry and got to know many other regulars who would come in each day. As I would go to the counter for my refill(s), I would often enter into conversations with people, or stop at their booth and talk. I got to know one man and his daughter who would always come in around 10:30 each morning to have a coffee and muffin and read the paper. I never got to know them by name, but I would talk to them a couple of times a week discussing topics that they would be reading in the paper that day.

About six years ago I started going to a different place for my morning coffee and to work. Even though I no longer saw them at McDonald's, I would run into them a couple of times a year at different places. When the funeral home called me last week and asked me to do a funeral on Friday, they said it was for somebody I met at McDonald's when I would go in and write my sermons. At first, I did not recognize who it was because I never got to know their names. When the clergy record was sent to me, I soon figured out it was the father of this woman who would bring him in each day. When I called her later that day, the daughter told me that her father requested that I perform the funeral service for him. Obviously, I touched this man in some special way many years back when we used to chat at McDonald's. Situations like this are always a reminder to me that we never know who we touch in positive ways as we go about our daily travels.

A couple of weeks ago I included the parable of the Good Samaritan in my sermon. The parable can be found in Luke 10: 27-37. If you are not familiar

with the parable, Jesus talked about a Jewish man who was traveling on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho. He was attacked by bandits along the way, who beat him up and left him for dead at the side of the road. By chance, a priest came along but when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. A Temple assistant also walked by and did not help the man. When the Samaritan came along, he felt compassion for the man. He went over to him, soothed his wounds and bandaged them, and then took the man to a nearby inn and looked after him. All three of these people were on their daily travels that day as the man lay at the side of the road badly beaten. Only the Samaritan made the effort to truly touch this badly injured man's life by showing care and compassion that day. This Samaritan man's example reveals to us some of the things required to touch people's lives in positive ways:

1. To pay close attention to the people we encounter on our daily travels.
2. To enter their space and situations as we encounter them.
3. To make the effort to speak to them, smile, or engage with them.
4. To give them the gift of our time.
5. To show concern, and care for them.

There is no doubt that this Samaritan touched this Jewish man's life in a very special way. I was doing many of these same things whenever I talked with this man and his daughter at McDonald's. This is just something I try to do with everybody that I encounter on my daily travels. Because Jesus has touched my life in such positive ways, I try to reciprocate by touching other people's lives as I encounter them. I never preached to this man and his daughter during our conversations. They knew I was a pastor. They knew I was there doing work. They also knew I was just trying to live my life each day to the best of my ability out of a love for Jesus. By doing this, I obviously left a positive impression on this man and he felt he wanted me to be the one to do his funeral.

God was the one all along arranging for these daily encounters and bringing me back into the picture for his funeral. The reason why I say this is I was aware from my conversations with this man that he was of some European descent. I could hear his accent, but not distinguish exactly from where. It was

not until I talked to his daughter last week that I discovered he had immigrated from Germany in 1952. It was at this moment I realized God had planned all those years ago for me to meet this man at McDonald's and eventually do his funeral. The reason why I say this is because in 1985 I studied for four months in Germany. I decided to use some of my knowledge of the German language at the funeral on Friday. When I spoke in German at the graveside, this man's daughter and son suddenly were moved to tears. It touched them that I would incorporate their father's native tongue into the service.

My example from last Friday is not unique to me. God has touched and blessed each one of us in so many special ways. One thing He desires is for us to follow the Samaritan's example and reach out and **touch others in a positive way**. Just as He did for the Samaritan, and for me with this man at McDonald's, God will guide our footsteps and lead us to people in our daily travels that we can have a positive impact on. The pandemic at times has restricted our daily travels. Now that we are travelling more, may we keep an eye open for those we may be encountering on our daily journeys. We might just discover God has chosen us to be the one to leave a positive impression on them.

Keep Safe and God Bless - Pastor Dean