

Through God's Eyes- ABCRM camp homily 2021

How do you fit a week's worth of lessons into a homily? Especially when I want to make sure the youth got enough time to share? I was not quite sure, so when I sat down to write I started with the first two questions I asked the kids this week... Who is your neighbor? What does it mean to love your neighbor?

I led a game before one of my lessons. This game is called Witch Trials. The idea of the game is you get everyone playing in a circle and we transport ourselves in our minds to Salem, Massachusetts during the witch trials of the 1600s. Every person in the circle gets a slip of paper and your piece of paper either says normal or witch. The goal is for everyone to figure out who are the witches among them, except no one can confirm or denied they are a witch.

Once the group decides and agrees that a member of the circle is a witch, then they are exiled from the circle. It took only 10 minutes for the group of 15 high schoolers to accuse and exile 4 people from the circle—

Including my co-pastor.

And also including Skylar Heath... they accused her, because she was my helper to get the game started and they thought she was too suspicious... My bad, Sky, my bad.

After this, we came back to the circle. We went one by one and said what was on our sheet of paper... normal, normal, normal.... After hearing normal about 7 times, Kaeli yells out "OMG WE ARE ALL NORMAL! THERE ARE NO WITCHES!" to which made the entire room burst into laughter.

Yes Kaeli, there were no witches.

When we talked about the social experiment we just did with this game, one girl named Jenna raised her hand and said:

"Wow, we just took your word that people were different, which changed our perception. Our perception became that them being different from us made them a threat. So, we kicked them out of our circle. Because we were afraid and paranoid."

Church family, I wonder how many people we kick out of our circles due to fear from false perceptions about our differences?

This year's theme at camp was "No Blind Eye," which my co-pastor for the week and I broke into two main sections. First, how do you see yourself versus how God sees you. Second,

which were the lessons I taught, how you see your neighbor versus how God sees your neighbor. This is a subject we talk a lot about here at First Baptist, but the interesting twist this week was the Camp Director, my good friend Lauren, wanted me to preach on the book of Ruth.

I was puzzled at first, because I was always taught that this story was a romantic love story as a child. How in the world was I going to shape this into a lesson about seeing yourself and your neighbor through God's eyes?

We started the week by asking what does it mean to love someone...

The answers at first were to be kind, to form a relationship, to care about someone, and to be present for someone. All good answers, the next day I asked how do we show love to others... many answers for that one, but my favorite was from Ariel when she said to smile at everyone you see.

By the end of the week, between the high school group and our church family group, our answer changed to this, "to love someone is to recognize that each person is made into the image of God and respect our shared humanity." We also decided that love was not a noun, but a verb. It required action. It means to not turn a blind eye to our neighbors. It means that we are supposed

to show people the same unconditional love and grace that God has shown us.

See, the Book of Ruth is a story about that very thing—showing unconditional love for your neighbor. I do not know how I did not see that before prepping for this week. Ruth was a Moabite (moab-ite). If you remember your biblical history then you will remember that there is a long history between the Israelites and Moabites (moab-ites). The Moabites come from the lineage of Lot and were not accepted by the Israelites.

According to society and cultural norms, Boaz should look down on Ruth. First off, she is a woman in a culture where women were viewed as property. Secondly, due to the racial tension of the situation. However, he doesn't. Society and culture tells Boaz that Ruth is different from him. That her people and her are less than and should be treated as such. Boaz is pushing back against the fear that is created by labeling someone as different.

We see that instead he recognizes her good heart and the care she has shown for Naomi. He allows her to glean with protection in his field so she can continue to care for Naomi and herself. He is showing compassion to his neighbor who needs it.

Boaz is showing respect for their shared humanity. There is a slight elephant in the room though. Boaz was technically

responsible for Naomi's well being according to Jewish law after her husband passed and their other relative turned her away. However, the major factor was Ruth. He did not have to care for Ruth.

He could have sent her away, but he didn't. Why would he do this? Because he recognizes that Ruth is a child of God just like him. Ruth too is made in the image of the holy creator. Once we are able to see the image of God in people around us, it is really hard to turn a blind eye to them.

What made this week at camp so special was that we realized it starts with us. We realized that as we first accept the radical and extravagant love of God for ourselves and let that love transform our life- then we too can start to truly extend that love to others. We can start to remove the titles, the labels, the fear, and all the other things that keep us from truly loving our neighbor. As one of the high schoolers said during our last worship session at camp, "may we never turn a blind eye again." Amen.