



Connecting Heart to Heart

Part II: Reflection *By Sharon Rapp*

Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it (Hebrews 13:2). When He appeared to the Eleven as they were eating, Jesus charged them: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15). Today we, His church, continue that commission. When we fail to do so, we miss both an opportunity and a blessing! The focus of Part II of our study is on recognizing the value of cultures around us and owning the desire and responsibility to reach out to build bridges and friendships. We look first at a number of examples of outreach in Jesus' ministry and the cultures addressed.

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, we praise You for the many and wondrous blessings You bring into our lives. Confessing that we are in need of forgiveness, we ask that You bring to our hearts and minds an awareness of the openings we have for outreach. Enlarge our understanding. Fill our hearts with Your love. Show us Your way. We pray in the name of Your Precious Son, who died that we might live. Amen.

Opening Activity

Discuss with a partner or small group the following situation: A couple in your congregation is excited about their adoption of a four-year-old child from another country. This precious child is brought to church and placed in your Sunday School class. As time progresses and the child understands more and more English, you notice that he never makes direct eye contact with you. Researching cultural differences on the Internet, you learn that a child's steady eye contact in some cultures is considered impolite or even challenging — differing greatly from the common assumption that not making eye contact shows disinterest, disrespect, or even dishonesty. Knowing this cultural difference, how might you adjust your interactions with the child? With the class? How might you support the family?

Each of us belongs to several cultures linked to (among others): birthplace, family status, gender, age, education, physical condition, profession, place of work, economic status, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion. How can awareness of cultural differences open wider the doors of communication? Name other situations, in addition to the previous one, in which multiple cultures meet.

Jesus, Witness to All

We do not know what kinds of cross-cultural experiences Joseph and Mary may have encountered on their flight into Egypt (**Matthew 2:13–15**) or during the time they lived there. It is likely, however, that the two-year-old Jesus would have found many people and things that were new upon His return to Nazareth (**Matthew 2:19–23**). What we know for certain is that the Son of Man lived the Father's desire that all people should come to know Him and come to Him.

Speed Search

Working independently or with a partner, look up one or more of the following verses as assigned or chosen. Present your one-word or short-phrase answer for the question below to the study group as a whole. Please limit your comments; the goal is to identify a maximum number of people mentioned in a minimum amount of time. [NOTE: If time is short, read only those references with an asterisk.] To whom does our Savior show His compassion/concern/love/respect in these verses?

Matthew 8:1–4 _____

Matthew 19:13–14 _____

Matthew 19:16–22 _____

Matthew 21:31b–32 _____

Matthew 22:15–22 _____

Mark 1:16–20 _____

Mark 5:2–8 _____

*Mark 5:22–24 _____

*Mark 5:25–34, 35–43 _____

*Mark 6:34–44 _____

*Mark 12:41–44 _____

*Luke 2:45–51 _____

*Luke 4:16–22a _____

Luke 7:1–10 _____

*Luke 7:36–50 _____

Luke 19:1–10 _____

*Luke 23:33–36a _____

Luke 23:40–43 _____

John 3:1–15 _____

John 4:7–10, 27–42 _____

*John 8:3–11 _____

John 8:12–18 _____

John 9:1–7 _____

John 20:24–28 _____

John 21:15–19 _____

One of the answers above is marked with #. Discuss it further by answering the following questions:

What was/is a stereotypical response to the people in this group?

What was Jesus' response?

Who might be considered part of the group today?

How do you think Jesus would respond to today's group?

Read **Revelation 1:4–6**. How does John describe Jesus Christ?

The Pharisees, their disciples, and the Herodians spoke accurately in **Matthew 22:16b**: “Teacher,” they said, “we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are.” Jesus often goes with the one who makes the request, goes to the person in need, goes into the “awkward” situation: “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost” (**Luke 19:10**).

Closing

Paul writes to Timothy about Christ Jesus, *who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession* (**1 Timothy 6:11–16** and **John 18:33–37**). John the Baptist assures his own disciples that Jesus *testifies to what he has seen and heard* (**John 3:32**). May we follow the example of our Lord and Savior in our interactions with all God’s children.

Say or sing together: “O Son of God, in Galilee” (*LSB* #841; *LW* #400), “Jesus Loves Me” [substituting “us” for “me” and “we” for “I”] (*LSB* #588), or the George F. Root chorus “Jesus Loves the Little Children.”

Closing Prayer

Father, we thank You that when we were yet sinners, You had such compassion for us that You sent Your only Son to become one of us to provide the sacrifice that covers our sin. Savior, thank You for Your sinless life that is our robe of righteousness by faith and for conquering our enemy death. Holy Spirit, thank You for supplying power to speak to every nation. Holy Trinity, so fill our hearts with thankfulness, love, respect, and courage that we may follow confidently the outreach example of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is in His name we pray. Amen.

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NOTE: Connecting Heart to Heart Part III: Action ... Building Bridges will be published in the LWQ Winter 2013.

For Further Study and/or Reflection

Complete Speed Search (or other sections) above. Discuss your answers with a partner or small group.

Create an “elevator speech” of 1–2 minutes that contains the major points that you would want to make in describing your faith and what it means to you.

Research the Internet for varied cultural attitudes toward interrupting, non-verbal communication, typical distance between conversationalists, physical touch, discussing money.

Locate and read the book *Angel Unaware* by Dale Evans Rogers, first published in 1953 (special edition 2004; Publisher Revell).

Investigate the witness and/or outreach of other examples in the New Testament: **Luke 1:2** (Luke); **Luke 2:25–38** (Simeon and Anna); **Acts 5:32** (the Holy Spirit); **Acts 8:5–6** (Philip in Samaria); **Acts 8:14** (the apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to Samaria); **Acts 9** (Ananias); **Acts 11:22–26** (Barnabas, and later Paul, at Antioch); **Acts 13:46–47** (Paul and Barnabas); **Acts 16:22–34** (Paul and Silas); **Acts 16–20** (Timothy); **Colossians 4:9** and **Philemon 10** (slave Onesimus and Paul); **Hebrews 13:3** (those in prison); Paul’s three missionary journeys and his journey to Rome.