

Diamond Hearts

22 January 2006

Bible passage: 2 Corinthians 4:5-6 (*The Message*)

“Remember, our message is not about ourselves...All we are is messengers, errand runners from Jesus for you. It started when God said, “Light up the darkness!” and our hearts filled up with light as we saw and understood God in the face of Christ, all bright and beautiful.”

Sermon nugget: Our hearts are like diamonds because they have the capacity to express divine light (God’s love). What are ways we let that light shine through to others?

The theme for this morning came from something Anne Lamott wrote in her latest book *Plan B*. Lamott talks about a friend of hers who practices a spiritual path that is called “Diamond Heart,” and Anne asked her to explain what that means. The friend’s explanation was this: our hearts are like diamonds because they have the capacity to express divine light, which is love. We are not just portals for this light, according to the friend, but we are actually made of the light with our hearts being faceted and shining.

Anne Lamott, in her typical humorous way, comments that she believes all this to a point—that we are beings of light wrapped in bodies that merely seem dense and ponderous, that we are made of atoms and molecules with infinite space and light between them. However, that’s where it stops for the author, who said that her friend is thin and does not have children. Lamott can meet her halfway, saying that we are diamond hearts wrapped in meatballs!

Whatever image we want to use, the message she is trying to convey is that each of us has the capacity to carry the light of God’s love within us and can carry that light into the world. That’s what the lighting of candles on Christmas Eve is all about; that’s the symbolism of that experience.

That’s really what our Bible passage today is about. It was written by Paul to the people in the church at Corinth. The writer is affirming that the passion he has for his ministry comes from the light of God filling his heart through Jesus. Our passage reads like this: “Remember, our message is not about ourselves...All we are is messengers, errand runners from Jesus for you. It started when God said, “Light up the darkness!” and our hearts filled up with light as we saw and understood God in the face of Christ, all bright and beautiful.”

But, for diamond hearts to be real, we have to get beyond the symbol, and see it in action. Phil Gulley and Jim Mulholland in their books, *If Grace is True* and *If God is Love*, talk about this very thing. They write, “I consider this kernel of human kindness to be the reflection of divine love. It is what

Quakers call the Inner Light, the guiding presence of God within us that can never be extinguished.” Furthermore, they say that having the spirit of God within us means that our hearts are broken by the things that break God’s heart. That means the ways our diamond hearts become evident is through acts of loving kindness and compassion.

That’s how the love of God is reflected into this world, and there are more examples than we could ever begin to count of the ways in which diamond hearts are living among us. Take, 71-year-old Louise Samford, for instance. She has launched a one-woman highway-beautification campaign in the middle of Houston, Texas. Four years ago, she got so tired of seeing all the trash along a busy Houston road that she got out her weedwacker and went to work. It took a month just to shovel out all the trash, but she got it done, and then started to plant grass and flowers in the median and along the road. Early on, she spent \$1000 of her savings on supplies, and now local businesses chip in to help.

There’s a woman like that along Keystone Avenue around 116th Street here in this area. Early on Sunday mornings as we are on our way to the theater, she is out in the median, trash bag in hand, picking up items discarded by others. It doesn’t seem to matter what the weather is, this is her one-woman mission, and whenever I see her at work, I see a diamond heart who cares about the world around her.

Recently, Mike and I were in Washington, D.C., and we visited the Holocaust museum there. We had been to a similar memorial in Jerusalem, but that has been a while, and this was our first visit to the one in our country. I was shocked once again by the horrible atrocities of that awful war, and it’s hard to imagine how anyone who went through that could survive physically, mentally or emotionally, but some did.

One of those who survived was Henri Landwirth, and he is the first to admit that his compassion for others, especially children who are battling life threatening diseases, is his way of battling the demons of his past. He was born in Belgium, and he was 12 when World War II broke out. His father was put in prison and shot, and Henri, his twin sister and their mother were taken to concentration camps. At one point, he was taken in front of a firing squad, but his would-be executioners lowered their rifles and told him to run. He regards his life from that day on as a miracle.

He made his money in the hotel industry, and has dedicated his life to helping others. He founded something called “Give Kids the World Village,” a 51-acre fantasy village for kids who are struggling with life-threatening diseases. He started the village to give sick kids and their families a chance to forget their worries for at least a week or so. So far, he has hosted more than 60,000 of them at the village’s brightly painted cottages, often also providing plane tickets, rental cars and admission to central Florida’s nearby theme parks. Landwirth displays a diamond heart when he says, “You’ve

got to give of yourself. Not money, but the essence of yourself. That is what makes life meaningful."

So does a man whose name is Izzy Paskowitz, a former champion pro surfer. His son Isaiah was diagnosed with autism; he could barely speak, refused eye contact and had terrible tantrums. Paskowitz was afraid that he would never find a way to connect with his child, but that was before a trip to Hawaii. Paskowitz carried his kicking and screaming 4-year-old son into the waves, and placed the boy on a board alongside him. Suddenly, Isaiah stopped crying, relaxed and seemed to enjoy the sounds and motion of the ocean. A new bond was forged between father and son, and this experience offered them all hope.

Paskowitz has passed that opportunity along to hundreds of other families as the founder of Surfers Healing, a nonprofit that runs free one-day surf camps for autistic children from Southern California to Hawaii to New York. It's a chance for kids to revel in life for a day, and it's an opportunity for parents to see their kids glowing with delight. Izzy says this beats anything he experience when on the pro circuit. Although he admits he's doing it selfishly to feel better and himself and his son, he is showing kindness, love and compassion to other families who are struggling. He's showing a diamond heart.

Lest we think that we have to be adults to show kindness and love, let's think about 12-year-old Jacob Komar. He's a bit of a genius, and is actually a sophomore at the University of Hartford, at the age of 12. His special gift is with computers—he can dismantle and build them. So he started a program to collect and refurbish discarded computers and give them away to needy families.

He and a friend started rebuilding cast-off family computers when they were in the first grade. Then in 2001, the school custodian showed them a garage full of school desktops bound for recycling. That's when they idea came to him to refurbish them and to give them to kids who can't afford them. He took the idea to a local community service organization, and that group provides a constant list of applicants. Now, Jacob and his friend are teaching other kids to follow in their footsteps. Jacob said, "One of the things that keeps me going is the look on kids' faces when I deliver a computer and set it up." Yes, it makes him feel good, and that only causes his diamond heart to shine even more brightly.

Even communities can show compassion and kindness to other communities. That's the case with the people of Hastings-on-Hudson, 18 miles north of Manhattan. This is an affluent community that wants for nothing, not at all like the city of Pembroke, Illinois, one of the poorest places in the country. Plastic and plywood cover the windows of dirt-floored shacks topped with tires to keep the roofs from blowing away. The unemployment rate is more than three times that of the rest of the state of Illinois. Children sleep on

bare mattresses and eat meager meals cooked on propane-fueled stoves.

You'd think there would be no connection between these very different communities. However, in the fall of 2003, Pamela Koner sat on the deck of her home in Hastings-on-Hudson and read an article in *The New York Times* about the children going hungry in Pembroke and she couldn't stand it. She knew she had to do something.

What she did was to rally some allies to the cause, and start a movement called Family-to-Family. More than 60 Hastings families made a commitment to send monthly cartons of food to families in Pembroke. The group also managed to get some corporate support with packaging supplies and food coupons. A grocery list for a week's worth of menus is created and given to the Hastings team, and then each family shops for "their" family in Pembroke. The effort continues to broaden to include monthly drives for coats, blankets, over-the-counter medicines and children's books. Pamela Koner hopes that this allows those in Pembroke to see other possibilities for their lives. She's doing her part to have a diamond heart.

What about us? In what ways are we letting the light of God's love shine in and through us? What about when we're driving our car? Are we being courteous and kind to other drivers? What about when we're dealing with a clerk in a store? Are we being patient and as helpful as we can be, regardless of what he or she is doing? Have we ever paid for someone else's meal, just because....?

How are we responding to those in the world around us? How do we respond to those who are hurting in our world? Where is our diamond heart showing itself?

Closing:

As we leave here this morning, I hope and pray that the light of God's love will shine through us into the world, and that the love in our hearts will sparkle like diamonds.

Have a good Sunday, and go in peace. Amen.