

## **Could I Do More? 2-27-05**

Matthew 25:31-40 (NIV)

*31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. 34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' 37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' 40 "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'*

We'll be setting aside our study in Matthew for a few weeks. This Sunday I need to inform you of Frank Mocsa's passing. Last Tuesday, Will was checking on him and found that Frank had taken his life. It came as a total shock. I waited to inform most of you because I wanted to tell you all together. Frank was a dear member of this family of believers. The first reaction from everyone is, "Could I have done more?" I have come to really appreciate that response. It is what I would expect from people who loved and valued Frank's presence with us.

I first want to address that question, "Could I have done more?" Frank was difficult to understand. His Hungarian accent always remained very strong. He liked his privacy and independence. We all loved his smile. To answer the question fully, I have to tell you what was being done, not to pat ourselves on the back or put us under guilt, but to truly evaluate where we were in fulfilling our God given direction to love one another. I don't know all that was being done. I can only tell you the things I was aware of. I'm sure there was more.

The elders of the church recognized his need for finances and invited him to do light work at the church almost a year ago. In that way he supplemented his income with dignity. Frank didn't want charity. He did that work for almost half a year and then quit coming. We didn't know why. Only after his death did we discover that he was experiencing shortness of breath. He wouldn't have told us about that, as he would have thought we would offer to help him financially without the work. Some of you invited him to lunch periodically. He had many invitations to Thanksgiving and Christmas, but in the last year turned them all down, probably because of his stomach problems. We made sure that a big plate was delivered to him. Many of you warmly greeted him every Sunday. The elders took care of his phone bill each month, and one of you generous souls paid for his dental work. A couple of the men made a pact to always greet him and give him special attention. One of the ladies made it her weekly assignment to bring one of the babies to him each week as it always put that big smile that smile we loved on his face.

Someone went to sweep his chimney and was troubled about his living conditions. That is when the elders began looking for some other arrangements for Frank. We were investigating purchasing Howard Crane's mobile home or purchasing a more recent model to replace the one he was in. One of the elders was even going to invite him to live in his home. In the mean time, one of you bought him an early Christmas present of an electric blanket and a warm coat and other clothes for winter. Someone else brought a load of wood for his fireplace.

Frank was seeing a chiropractor for a problem with his back. One brother in Christ thought his pain may have been from how hard it was to close his sliding front door, so they put new rollers on it. Recently, the chiropractor told Frank he had a hernia and needed an operation. Frank told us about it and Ed

made an appointment with a surgeon and then took Frank to that appointment making sure he understood what was happening. One of you volunteered to cover any expenses not met by Medicare. The elders met with Frank and prayed for him and explained that it was not serious and that he would be ok. He was going to stay in one of their homes during his recovery, and at that time, some of the men were going to do some repairs to his home. I'm so proud of all of you who expressed the love of God to Frank. You did it as if he were Jesus Himself. You didn't do it for a reward, but you certainly do have a heavenly reward.

Could we have done more? Certainly, any of us could have done more. Did God expect more? Would Frank have received more? I don't think so. Remember the difference between conviction and condemnation. Condemnation says you didn't do enough and you can never be forgiven. That is not of God. Conviction says there were ways in which you might have done more. It is too late to express your love to Frank, but there are many in this congregation that still need your love. Take that conviction and let it change how you act today, not fill you with remorse over yesterday.

But Frank was afraid. I believe he feared the surgery, but even more, I think he feared being a burden to others. I'd like everyone to hear me with your whole attention. Taking your life is not an answer. It robs us of expressing the love of Christ and eternal rewards. It robs you of the ways in which the Lord wanted to bless and work through you. It is a lack of trust in God's wisdom and provision. If you are a single lonely person, or a married person worried about the burden you may be to your spouse, I'm asking you to give that to God right now and express your faith in Him by not taking matters into your own hands. Share your feelings with those that love you so that they can help you. They want to help you. It is their blessing to help you.

My father took his life when I was just 9. Instead of facing his sin and dealing with it for other people's sake, he chose the easy way out, easy for him, hard for everyone else. Frank was afraid. He chose the easy way out, easy for him, but not for us. Perhaps, in the fear of the moment, he thought it would be easier for us, but it isn't. Do you recall three weeks ago when we first knew Frank was going to need surgery that the Holy Spirit said through me during the sermon, "Frank, Jesus says to you today, 'Be courageous I am with you. Do not fear'"? I had not planned on saying that, but the Holy Spirit was trying to get through to Frank. He was trying to overcome the voices of doubt and fear that were attacking Frank's mind. Please listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit when we meet. It is the voice of the love of God guiding us through this confusing world we live in. It is light in the darkness to guide our way. How I wish Frank had heard and received those words! How I wish each week we would take the things He says to us to heart! What a difference His word can make if we will receive it.

The next question that has been voiced is, "Does God forgive suicide?" Chaplain Ed has to encounter this on an all too frequent basis. I'd like for Him to share with you some of his convictions on the subject.

Pastor Ed: Suicide is one of the most difficult losses to process and grieve. It is a horrible tragedy, a devastating trauma that paralyzes us in shock and disbelief. It is always terrible, but the impact seems worse when a Christian takes his own life, and when there were few, if any, warning signs in advance.

Suicide raises all kinds of questions for us; Questions about God; About life and death, about nature of sin and forgiveness and about the eternal destiny of its victims.

I believe the place to begin is to remind ourselves of some important truths and characteristics of God. Psalms 139:1-6 tells us: (Read)

God knows us fully! Regarding these verses, Frank could have said: "I am transparent to God." (Read verses 7-12)

God is always with us--no matter where we go or what we experience. Frank said it like this, "there is nowhere to go to flee from God." God knows us fully and is always with us. This was just as true for Frank in his dark hours of depression as it is for you and me.

Some Christian traditions and churches believe and teach that suicide is a mortal sin, that is, that one cannot enter eternal life with God in heaven after committing suicide, no matter what your faith or manner of life, and no matter what factors contribute to the suicide. I want to say very clearly that neither I, nor do I believe this congregation, hold that position. Such a position, it seems to me, is inconsistent with what the Bible teaches about salvation and condemnation.

Now it is true that the Bible doesn't speak directly on the issue of suicide. Like many other issues, we must draw our conclusions about it based on our understanding and interpretation of God and the biblical issues that relate to it. Keeping in mind what we said about God and God's character, let's look at some other relevant issues.

Now, while we may accept that it is possible for a person to turn away from God and, eventually, be "lost" at death, if they do not repent and if they continue to resist God's efforts to draw them back, we do not believe that every sin destroys our salvation, which then can only be restored if we consciously know about and repeat of the sin. We believe that the grace of God and the forgiveness of our sins through the atonement of Christ apply not only to our past sins, but also to our present and future sin.

If we are trusting in Jesus Christ, making him and his kingdom our highest loyalty and seeking to follow him daily in life, then we are secure in our salvation even when we sin, consciously or unconsciously. And we all--sin frequently, even constantly.

There is no doubt that destroying a human life is sin. Suicide is sin! But it does not have a more powerful effect on us spiritually or eternally than any other sin. Suicide is not unforgivable! It is true that a person who commits suicide cannot repent of that sin afterward. But for a person who was a Christian, who faithfully sought to follow Christ and honor God, and who was trusting in Jesus for forgiveness and eternal life, suicide does not, in my judgment, nullify one's salvation. God's grace and loving mercy are broad enough to cover that final act of sin for such a person.

Now understand, I'm not saying that everyone who commits suicide is saved. But neither is everyone who commits suicide damned or condemned.

The Suicide victims salvation depends on the same thing as everyone else's salvation--their trust in Jesus Christ and acceptance of God's free gift of salvation in Christ.

We who knew Frank knew, without question, that he was fully committed to the Lord. He loved and trusted in Christ, and he sought to live a life of faithful discipleship with a level of obedience and radical integrity that few other Christians have.

So how can a man of God like Frank take his own life? I don't know for sure. But even Christians experience depression and loneliness, even severe depression. This frequently involves chemical imbalances in the brain, which prevent a person from being able to cope in typical fashion. It's similar to an insulin imbalance in the blood, which causes uncontrollable effects on various organs and can be deadly.

As we know, the brain is an organ, and when the chemicals become imbalanced, the brain is sometimes not able to function as it normally would. This doesn't mean the depressed person is "crazy," but it seems to diminish the person's usual ability to handle stress, hardship, emotional pain, or ambiguity. One's thinking becomes distorted, and sometimes the sense of despair and darkness becomes

overwhelming. The things that are important to the person and their responsibilities in life seem to fade into the darkness of the depression.

Sometimes it seems that there is no way out except through death. This, of course, is never actually true--that suicide is the only option. And it is never ever a good option. But it sometimes seems that it is to the person wrestling with long-term loneliness and severe depression. The psalmist said,

"If I say, 'Surely the darkness will hide me  
and the light become night around me,' even  
then the darkness will not be dark to you;  
the night will shine like the day,  
for darkness is as light to you." Psalm 139:11-12

God is with us even in the darkness of depression and despair. The darkness we experience is not darkness to God. This doesn't mean recovery from depression is easy or quick, but it is possible. God is with us and wants to see us through the darkness and out into God's light. We often need assistance from counselors or friends, and sometimes we need medication to restore the balance of chemicals the brain needs to keep on going through it. However, there is always a way out other than suicide. Unfortunately, Frank didn't appear to reach for help at this time, and he lost his way and gave up on life. However, he didn't give up on God, and I am certain that God did not give up on Frank.

Paul asks a profound question in Romans 8:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?  
Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine  
or nakedness or danger or sword?  
As it is written:  
"For your sake we face death all day long;  
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."  
No, in all these things we are more than conquerors  
through him who loved us.  
For I am convinced that neither death nor life,  
neither angels nor demons,  
neither the present nor the future, nor any  
powers, neither height nor depth,  
nor anything else in all creation, will be able  
to separate us from the love of God that is in  
Christ Jesus our Lord.

As it says in verse 1 of that same chapter, "There is now no  
condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Frank was and is in Christ Jesus. I trust that this is true of you as well.

Pastor Paul: Let me give you one Scriptural example of what I believe is forgiveness of suicide. King Saul had disobeyed God time and time again. He was wounded in battle. To keep himself from the humiliation of his enemy, he fell on his sword. Before that took place, he had a medium contact Samuel, a thing forbidden in the Law. Samuel told him that he and his sons (Jonathon included) would join him the next day. 1Samuel 28:19 If you believe Samuel was in heaven, that means that Saul would be in heaven that next day. That is my understanding of the passage. When the Bible says that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin, it means **all**. 1John 1:7; Ephesians 1:7

It may be helpful for you to note that a number of God's prophets felt such despair that they wanted God to end their life. It is a feeling that most of us face at one time or another. They left it in God's hands and went on to do great things. What they thought was the end was only a dip in the road of life.

Now, by contrast, I want to tell you about another couple from East Germany, Mike and Jeanette. (picture of M & J) We met them on vacation. They had risen from poverty to enjoy a nice home. (Picture of their home) It has a nice yard. Mike was proud to show me that he had everything we have in America. The pictures he sent me took forever to download because his camera was the latest model with the most mega-pixels. They had purchased new BMWs. (picture of their BMWs) They had the best of everything. We were at this resort for a week. They were too, only they had already been exploring Central America for three weeks before that. They were young, beautiful, affluent, and living a life East Germans dream of until the tsunami swept them off a beach in the Indian Ocean. Living for this world can end in a moment, and then we face the Judge of all living and give an account of our life. Hebrews 9:27

This is our brother Frank. (picture of Frank) This is Frank's home. (picture of his mobile and car) This is Frank's car. Frank couldn't afford a vacation. He could barely meet his monthly expenses, but he had a church family that loved and cared for him. In spite of the fear that overcame Frank, in the end, who was wealthier? Do you realize how wealthy you are?

I have no doubt that Frank has entered his heavenly home. I found myself singing "Dancing with the Angels" and realized I was singing about Frank. I don't know about Mike and Jeanette. We witnessed to them some, but I didn't have the impression that they had accepted God's love for them. Their focus was this world and its pleasures.

Could I have done more? There is that question again. With Frank, I have a peace that I believe is from a clear conscience. With Mike and Jeanette, I had to ask for forgiveness from my Master for not saying more. I believe that every soul is brought to a point of decision. I also believe I should have played more of a part in bringing them to that place of decision. I can be condemned and guilty all the rest of my life, or I can yield to conviction and ask my heavenly Father to forgive me and give me a greater urgency and boldness to share at every opportunity. People need Jesus. They need a spiritual family that expresses the love of God to them.

In these matters, we each stand at our unique place in our relationship with God. I think in one way or another, we have all been convicted this morning. Don't be condemned; be convicted. Welcome conviction. Be more determined than ever to yield to the Holy Spirit, whether it is to love "the least of these", or to share what is really important in life, a relationship with Jesus Christ. Will you follow Jesus, whether that means to give of your time and resources to those in need or stick your neck out and share Jesus with those who have the greatest need of all, the need to know that Jesus has provided for their spiritual poverty?

Will you live for what matters? Will you show love to the lonely? Will you share Christ with the lost?