

"LIVING IN 3 D"

Matthew 5:13

Can you believe it, can you believe it? After I preached my sermon last Sunday and left the church I was thinking about the topic of "walking across the room" and who I need to walk across to and enter the "zone of the unknown." And wouldn't you know it; I was right there with the person I mentioned in my sermon that I needed to speak to. Here is how it happened- after church last Sunday I met with Meghan Hillebrand and her parents over lunch to begin to talk about her upcoming wedding this summer and I gave Meghan the packet of wedding materials. Meghan's fiancé was in Charlotte, NC getting ready for finals and so he wasn't with us. But lo and behold, we are at the restaurant and the server I have been thinking about. She was waiting on our table. And I felt the prompting of the Holy Spirit to go deeper than the usual "Hello" and, as the Dick and Laurie Hillebrand are my witnesses, I inquired about her children, their ages and then mentioned our Summer's Best Two Weeks summer sports camp

and one of her kids is of age and she seemed open to the program and now I am going to get her materials and.... Who knows what will happen. As you left church and went about your week did you begin to think about people you could reach out to and "walk across the room" to engage in a conversation that might give them a taste of the single greatest gift- Jesus Christ?

Friends, remember what I told you last week? We are in this together and I am learning and trying some of what I am suggesting, hopefully, just like you. And the reason for this 4 week series and the reason why we are talking about non-threatening evangelism is so we can all become walk-across-the room people. And another reason is because walk-across-the-room people are typically the ones who get to be used in pointing people far away from God to God and faith.

Folks, this is what I believe God's heart yearns for- you, me, pointing people to faith because God gave His one and only Son, Jesus Christ to

reach lost people and help them get found. And think of it this way- for those of you who truly want to become more Christ-like the good news is that you become most like Him when you help Christ help lost people get found. Doesn't that make sense?

If you were with us last week I ended with my third point which was, "Just Walk." We talked about that if we wanted to get on with the task of giving people we know, those around us the single greatest gift we can give them- an introduction to the God who created them and loves them then we will: **1) Be willing to enter the Zone of the Unknown** where we voluntarily move from our Circles of Comfort and begin engaging with someone who might need God; **2) Listen for the Spirit's promptings** where we rely on the Holy Spirit's guiding and not our own; and **3) Just walk**, remembering that Jesus took a long, cosmic walk across the universe for us, right?

This morning I want to focus on what happens right after you make up your mind to “just walk.” What I mean is what you should be thinking about, praying about, talking about when you enter that Zone of the Unknown. And why focus on this? Well, saying you will walk is one thing, knowing what to do once you’re standing face-to-face with that person is another thing. So after you decide to walk, the questions- What do I think about? What do I pray about? What do I say? are important. So let’s live in 3 D and focus on the 3 Ds and begin.

First, **Develop Friendships**. Walk-across-the-room people are always looking for ways to make friends. Their mission- seek and search out new friends for when we do, then we are in a constant “search mode.” The follower of Christ needs to watch for ways to connect with people, needs to look for friendships in the making. And maybe, just maybe heaven holds its breath when it looks down on us and wonders, will they lean into the faith and courage that God has given them for this very moment in time- the

moment when you're operating in the Zone of the Unknown? Will they stick out their hand of friendship? Will they open wide their arms of acceptance?

And heaven might be watching and then breaks forth in a heavenly cheer

when we do the very thing we are talking about, the very thing God is

asking us to do. It is all about relationships; it is all about friendships, new

friendships. But here is what can happen to the Christ-follower. We get into

a state of "Cocooning." Think of it this way- we come to know Christ and we

engage with people who do not know Christ and we begin to walk across the

room with them and they come to faith and then they enter into your

Christian Cocoon world and you start hanging out with these new followers

of Christ, because you have this main thing in common, Christ, right? And

then you're in the church where you can really Cocoon with other Cocooning

Christians and can you guess what happens?

You might find yourself and your life revolving around 100% Cocooning Christians who love Jesus and we are not engaging with others who are far away from God because, I speak from experience, it is easier, it is more comfortable to stay in a Cocooning Christian state, in that Circle of Comfort than it is to venture off into the Zone of the Unknown with someone new. And a love for folks not yet walking with God wanes and our Circle of Comfort becomes more cozy and comfortable and, do you understand what I am saying?

Isn't it true- we all have a loving heart towards some people? But what about this- almost all of us has a secret list of people we just can't stand? Maybe it was the person who, figuratively speaking, stabbed you in the back when they asked if they could borrow money and they never paid you back. Or the person who said some hurtful words that, every time you see him or her, you want to reach out and grab them around the throat and, and, well, you fill in the blank. So there are those you have good reason not

to like. But try this one on- some of us don't like entire groups of people. If you are in the company of those who didn't vote like you voted. Some of us might have our stomachs all tied up in knots when we are confronted by certain ethnic groups and, you know what I'm talking about don't you? Now I know I am hitting some nerves with some of us and we don't usually go here, especially in mixed company and it's, well, uncomfortable to discuss but, OK, let's be honest, many of us have a "list" and we would just rather not have to deal with those on our "list." So to be challenged to love people outside my "circle" well.... And maybe we give a little and say, "OK, if I am being asked to love some people outside my circle then they better be nice to me, they better be polite to me, they better not hurt me, they better be safe and stable and.... Hey, they better be deserving!"

Gee, this is Mark Ruppert speaking here, and yet maybe I'm not alone. Do you have any qualifiers too? Tell me you're like me and that you do. I don't want to be filleting myself open to you today and be up here standing

in my sinfulness all alone. Here could be our litany of "better-be's"- "They better be white, they better be black, they better be pro-life, the better be pro-choice, they better be conservative, they better be liberal, they better be Independent, they better be Democrat, they better be Republican, they better be Green, they better be young, they better be old, they better be single, they better be rich." Am I connecting with anyone out there?

And if you have your Bibles with you please turn to Luke 15:1f where we read, "Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, 'This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.' So he told then this parable: 'Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the 99 in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?' And if you read on in chapter 15 you will read about the lost coin and the lost son. Friends, Jesus was not interacting with people on the Pharisees and scribes lists, was He?

As a matter of fact the religious leaders hated these people but somehow they ended up on Jesus' list and He is hanging out with them. Jesus told three very interesting parables about the lost in Luke 15 and I wonder if just one of those Pharisees who heard Jesus that day was pierced by those three stories to the point that the Pharisee just couldn't shake Jesus story from his mind. And maybe he woke up at 4 in the morning as I have been recently and couldn't get these stories out of his mind- there is the lost sheep, the lost coin and the rebellious son and he asks, "What does this all mean? And he focuses on the fact that in each story there is something missing- a sheep, a coin, a son. And then the Pharisee says, "It goes deeper than this. In each story what was missing was important, it really counted, it mattered. And now the Pharisee's heart realizes that the heart of God is not like his tainted heart and he gets in touch with the indiscriminate, loving heart of God that doesn't have a hate list and God and wants all people to go to heaven and not hell?

Friends, unless we throw our lists away we will never leave our Circles of Comfort and enter the Zone of the Unknown through our walk across the room. So we need to be about Developing Friendships.

Second, **Discover Stories**. We need to be willing to be patient and listen to the other person's story. Listen first and then, later on, way down the line, respond. Because, hear this, if we are not patient in listening but right away, giving them spiritual answers and solutions before we really get a grasp of the person and understand them and their situation, it might muddy the waters and do more harm than good.

Bill Hybels tells the story of a man who was in the same racquetball league. They got along well and over the course of weeks upon weeks of playing the trust levels and their relationship began to develop. Six months into the friendship the fellow told Bill that he was working through a difficult situation with his grown son. They were at a difficult impasse after a disagreement and the father had cut off all communication with his son.

Now the father was regretting his decision and he wanted his son back but was afraid it was a lost relationship. In the weeks that followed Bill patiently talked with the man, asked good questions about his interests, his spiritual life, family dynamics; never pressing, never judging, not trying to fix it.

Then the day came when Bill felt a nudging from the Spirit, and it was a risky move. Bill says, "but I felt like our relationship could withstand it. And so, one day I just recommended that he visit with a counselor-friend of mine. I kept thinking that the situation with his son could be improved, and I knew from personal experience that a Christian counselor can be tremendously valuable in resolving complex relational struggles. Even if he wasn't a Christ-follower, I thought the visit would really help him." Well, the man agreed to go and after a few counseling session, he and his son did reconcile. Here is the catch- Bill was willing to walk with that man for all those weeks and because he hadn't tried to force a spiritual agenda into

every interaction the guy was willing get counseling and his deep need was met.

What does this story teach us? Faithfulness to be a good friend. Patience in uncovering the other person's deep needs. Genuineness in wanting to help meet those needs. Bill hard listened and had earned the right to be heard.

And the final D- **Discern Next Steps**. We eventually will come to divine forks in the road where you can listen to the person's story and then pray for what you need to do next and engage them further or after you have listened you thank them and just walk away. So if you engage the person further, if you are thinking about investing your time and energy in this person you need to be in earnest prayer, asking God if this is where He wants you to go. Ask the Holy Spirit for direction and wisdom and guidance and for the gift of creativity because, Lord knows, you might need it. Because if you go out on your own without the Lord directing you it might

backfire. Time will not permit me to tell my "Keith story" but just know that I was impatient and went for the clarifying question when I should have waited.

What I want you to do is get in touch with the **Next Steps** that you might take with someone but do this first- think about the Next Steps that were taken with you. Maybe someone just said, "I'll be praying for you." Maybe someone gave you a book. Think about the Next Steps that someone took with you and write them on the sermon outline and then think about the Next Steps you can take with your person. I have to get information on Summer's Best Two Weeks to my person as I continue my walk across the room. I ask you to pray, starting today, for the Holy Spirit's promptings, asking Him to lead us to those we are supposed to build bridges of friendship. So that by the end of this week we will be able to say, this was a week that was special. Amen.

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Introduction: Can you believe it?

God's heart yearns for you, me pointing people to faith

Last Sunday's three points:

1. **Be willing to enter the _____ of the _____**
2. **Listen for the Spirit's _____**
3. **Just _____**

The 3 Ds

First, **D_____ Friendships**

The mission- seek and search out new friends

Christian "Cocooning"

A secret list of people we just can't stand

A litany of "better-be's"

Luke 15:1f

Second, **D_____ Stories**

Be patient and listen to the other person's story

What does the story teach us?

Third, **D_____ Next Steps**

Divine forks in the road

Conclusion: **The Next Steps someone took for me were:**