

## THE SOWER

CENTER FOR CLERGY EXCELLENCE NEWSLETTER, AUGUST 2016

### RADICAL ACCEPTANCE

by John W Nupp

Some problems cannot be solved; most people cannot be fixed. Perhaps you, like me, have encountered the frustration that comes from trying to solve the unsolvable problems in your life or fix the unfixable people in your home or in your church.

A few years ago, the band Coldplay made a popular love song out of this longing, called "Fix You." I've become familiar with this song since our youngest has suddenly become obsessed with listening to Coldplay for hours on end. He also suddenly started styling his hair each morning and practicing trick basketball shots all day. Just like his older siblings, Jeremy finds himself driven by unseen forces to try new things, to test the limits of the acceptable and the possible. As we approach the middle school years for the fourth and final

time, my wife and I must once again face the challenges posed by fickle friends and fluctuating hormones. Will we try to "fix" our son, or will we allow God's grace to guide us?

I was challenged recently by the report of a town in Belgium known for its long-standing hospitality toward persons who seldom find a welcome anywhere else in the

world. For the past 700 years, the town of Geel

"FOR CHRIST'S LOVE  
COMPELS US...."  
II CORINTHIANS 5:14a (NIV)

(pronounced like "hale") has been known as a place of refuge for those who suffer the stigma of mental illness. Individual households will welcome boarders from other villages for a paradoxical form of treatment: they avoid any attempt to solve or to fix the person. The evidence suggests that, especially with respect to persons with some forms of schizophrenia, this radical hospitality heals people in more profound ways than any other form of treatment.

I say I was challenged by this report because our family

Questions for  
Reflection:

How do you renew  
your connection with  
God's radical  
acceptance on a  
daily basis?

How do you explain  
this grace to the  
people you serve  
alongside, who have  
heard about God's  
love a thousand  
times before? What  
about to those who  
have never heard?

Beyond providing  
verbal explanations,  
what ways have  
proven helpful for  
allowing others to  
experience God's  
acceptance?

How can you make  
room for those who  
are searching to find  
acceptance, other  
than shipping them  
off to Belgium?

includes not only a rising tween, but also two teenaged sons with disabilities. How much time have I spent, every today, trying to fix them? Add to this my attempts to correct our oldest daughter as she prepares to move off to her first apartment, not to mention my wife of 25 years. In trying to fix people, not only am I expending a lot of energy with little hope of success, the evidence suggests I may actually be making matters worse! If such is the case in my own family, imagine what damage I may have done along the way in the churches I have served, trying to "fix" people based on my own limited resources, rather than drawing on the great reservoir of grace given to me in Jesus Christ.

If you, like me, swing from frustration to despair, from trying to fix people to feeling guilty for doing so, then I have some good news for us all. Dig around in that collection of letters from Pastor Paul to those troubled Corinthian churches,

and re-discover these simple words: "the love of Christ compels me" (II Corinthians 5:14a, NIV). This power works, not only in homes filled with tweenagers and teenagers, but in God's house. Amid all the other things that push and pull us in this world, one over-arching force guides us: the very love of God, at work among us. That same power which moved in Jesus' compassionate life -- from the manger to the cross to that empty garden tomb -- this same love compels us to live for Christ, who gave himself for us.

While this radical acceptance might sound like a foreign concept in the field of medical practice, where so many resources come to bear on solving problems and fixing people, we have thousands of years of practice living in that place where the grace that God has freely given us can make true and lasting change in the world. Do we realize just how earth-shattering this love, this grace, this radical

acceptance can be? Just imagine what changes God might bring about from Minnesota to Maryland, from downtown Baltimore to the streets of Dallas, when radical acceptance, otherwise known as God's grace, rules the day! We are blessed to be vessels of this radical acceptance.

As I hope for more of this grace in my home, in the churches we serve and in the communities we care about, one truth keeps me going: this love does not begin with us or end with us -- it begins with Jesus the Christ and doesn't end even when the kingdom comes in all fullness. God's love compels us, calling us to serve, radically accepting me and you in our brokenness and showing to the world the power of God's grace. May it flow through our churches and our homes, through all hearts who are willing to accept the sacrificial love which brings hope to a hurting world.

## SHARING OUR SPIRITUAL PROFILES

### Life beyond social media

Take a moment to consider some of the markers of your "spiritual profile". I'll get us started, but if you are willing to share these with other colleagues in future issues, please send me an email at JNupp@bwcumc.org.

**Your Life Verse:** Psalm 37:4

**Go-to Biblical book:** Hebrews

**Recommended movie (Classic):**

"Avalon" directed by Barry Levinson

**Recommended Book:** "Joan of Arc" by Mark Twain

**Book every pastor should take**

**time to slog through:** The Divine Conspiracy, by Dallas Willard

**Favorite spot (local):**

Cunningham Falls

**Dream vacation:** Geel, Belgium (see article!)