

## Human Relations Sunday



# So Much That Is Good

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
January 20, 2013 Rev. Larry Moffet

Nine of us lived this past week at Lydia Patterson Institute (LPI) six blocks from the U.S.-Mexico border, in El Paso. It was a Mission-Service Trip. *(photo above)*

Affectionately nicknamed “La Lydia,” LPI is a mission high school of the United Methodist Church. Its purpose is to provide a quality education to high school students, prepare them for college, and empower them to lead lives as servant-leaders.

If it is hard to for you to understand what LPI is all about, you are not alone. People who’ve served at the school for decades also struggle to put into words how lives are changed for good at LPI. So much that is so good happens at LPI.

I could use many words and still not convey the way relationships transform lives at LPI. Our team from First Church will meet on Feb. 3 to plan an open forum for the 9:30 hour for your questions and answers. No money from First Church’s budget was used for the trip.

Members of the team paid for their own airline tickets, or someone willingly paid for them. Cost of materials, food, and a contribution to LPI is covered by team members or from freewill donations to a lunch here at the church and by Ruth Circle.

To see an LPI student who was very shy four years ago now lead with effectiveness is worth the cost for me. We had four with us on the trip who are currently undergraduate students. For students at LPI to see college students who are doing well is a gift to them.

Paul wrote that all of us function as one body. We all have different roles:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;  
<sup>5</sup>there are varieties of services, but the same Lord;  
<sup>6</sup>there are varieties of activities,  
but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone--  
<sup>7</sup>To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good,

**We saw that in the students at LPI. We saw that in teachers and staff. We saw that in each other.**

To see students who met Tom when he was there a year ago rush to him and surround him was beautiful. To see Grady quietly start fixing things was a joy. To see Sam observe, interact, and articulate strengths and challenges of LPI’s culture was a gift. To see the gentle way Carol and Jake served with a staff member who is retiring, letting her process her hopes and fears for LPI was tender. Bob, Brent, Megan, and I all served in varying roles, too.

And we watched out for each other. It was cold. Each day it was colder in El Paso than here in Lincoln. Our little guest house with bunk beds had an ancient, ineffective furnace and lacked insulation. Several of us, including me, slept the first night with our work boots on our feet. We realized many students and their families live this way when temperatures dip. At 6 a.m. some of us walked across the border, met students, and did what they do every day of their lives: go through a U.S. Immigration checkpoint. (A long bridge connects downtown Juarez, Mexico with El Paso. At the end of the bridge is a U.S. Immigration interrogation/inspection installation.)

We had fun. We laughed. The interactions with students and staff went heart-deep very fast. It is a relationship-based culture, very healing for we who live in a transaction-based culture. Our culture has many strengths; however we do tend to value others for what we do / can do for each other. People at LPI and in Mexico focus on personalities, quirks and relationships.



This is what today's Gospel is all about. It is the first of Jesus' "signs" or actions that some call miracles in John's Gospel. It is for a celebration.

**Celebration is at the heart of the faith, not rules.**

God does not want our religion to be too holy to be happy, says Robert Brearley. "God wants the community of faith to be a celebration of people. We are called to attract people by the fun there is in being a Christian." Notice: Jesus' first "sign" is a celebration. The faith starts by celebrating.

Jesus and his mother had friends, celebrated, fretted when something went wrong, and balked at leaving the party to solve another's problem. Nudged into action, Jesus does his part to keep the celebration going.

*(Mission Team attends chapel with LPI students)*



Abundance is a key to the Gospel, too: 6 stone jars of wine-- just 1 might have been enough. We are surrounded by so much that is so good.

When have you been surprised? When did someone push you to do something you weren't quite ready for? Jesus did too! By his mother!

**We went to El Paso, to LPI to work with our hands.  
We ended up working even more with our hearts.  
Something powerful will come out of all this.**



*(overlooking El Paso and Juarez at night)*

**We are surrounded by so much that is so good.**

And what you thought you came for -  
is only a shell, a husk of meaning  
from which the purpose breaks only when it is fulfilled -- if at all.  
Either you had no purpose --  
or the purpose is beyond the end you figured -  
and is altered in fulfillment.

*- T.S. Eliot, "Little Gidding," Four Quartets*

From **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Sermon**  
**"Loving Your Enemies:"**

When Jesus says "Love your enemies," he is setting forth a profound and ultimately inescapable admonition. Have we not come to such an impasse in the modern world that we must love our enemies-or else? The chain reaction of evil-hate begetting hate, wars producing more wars-must be broken...

Another reason why we must love our enemies is that hate scars the soul and distorts the personality. Mindful that hate is an evil and dangerous force, we too often think of what it does to the person hated. This is understandable, for hate brings irreparable damage to its victims. We have seen its ugly consequences in the ignominious deaths brought to six million Jews by hate-obsessed madman named Hitler, in the unspeakable violence inflicted upon Negroes by bloodthirsty mobs, in the dark horrors of war, and in the terrible indignities and injustices perpetrated against millions of God's children by unconscionable oppressors. ...

A third reason why we should love our enemies is that love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend. We never get rid of an enemy by meeting hate with hate; we get rid of an enemy by getting rid of enmity. By its very nature, hate destroys and tears down; by its very nature, love creates and builds up. Love transforms with redemptive power...

My friends, we have followed the so-called practical way for too long a time now, and it has led inexorably to deeper confusion and chaos. Time is cluttered with the wreckage of communities which surrendered to hatred and violence. For the salvation of our nation and the salvation of mankind, we must follow another way.

While abhorring segregation, we shall love the segregationist. This is the only way to create the Beloved Community.

To our most bitter opponents we say: "We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We shall meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will, and we shall continue to love you. We cannot in all good conscience obey your unjust laws because noncooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good. Throw us in jail and we shall still love you. Bomb our homes and threaten our children, and we shall still love you. Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our community at the midnight hour and beat us and leave us half dead, and we shall still love you. But be ye assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. One day we shall win freedom but not only for ourselves. We shall so appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win you in the process and our victory will be a double victory."

**Prayers of the Faithful:**

We thank you for Servant Leaders in ever age, including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Mohatmas Ghandi, Nelson Mandela, Mother Theresa, and the nameless servant leaders who by their lives made it possible for us to be more effective channels of your love and peace.

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For all who serve your people, O Lord,  
and especially those who serve you in places torn by violence  
or religious strife.

We pray to you, God in your mercy, **Hear our Prayer**

For those who feel exiled from your Church,  
and struggle to find a smooth path by which they can come home,  
help us to live lives that show the goodness all around them,  
and by our love for you and each other to enable them to find their  
path to be servant leaders guided by your Spirit.  
God in your mercy, **Hear our Prayer**

For those who need to feel your healing power,  
and for all who care for them. We pray to you,  
God in your mercy, **Hear our Prayer**

For those who have died, including Ellie Dixon,  
and for all anywhere who are ill or who grieve.

Give us so deep a faith that in all times and in all places  
we may without fear commit those we love and ourselves  
to your constant love and care.  
We pray to you, God in your mercy, **Hear our Prayer.**

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We ask for an deeper awareness of the goodness all around us,  
Help us not to just see your Goodness and Extravagance,  
but to participate in it, guided by the Holy Spirit,  
until all of life is celebration.  
God in your mercy, **Hear our Prayer.**

**EPISTLE SCRIPTURE I CORINTHIANS 12:4-11**

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;  
<sup>5</sup>and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord;  
<sup>6</sup>and there are varieties of activities,  
but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.  
<sup>7</sup>To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good,  
<sup>8</sup>To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom,  
and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit,  
<sup>9</sup>to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the  
one Spirit,  
<sup>10</sup>to another the working of miracles,  
to another prophecy,  
to another the discernment of spirits,  
to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of  
tongues.  
<sup>11</sup>All these are activated by one and the same Spirit,  
who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

**\*GOSPEL SCRIPTURE JOHN 2:1-11**

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee,  
and the mother of Jesus was there.  
<sup>2</sup>Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.  
<sup>3</sup>When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have  
no wine.”<sup>4</sup>And Jesus said to her,  
“Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet  
come.”  
<sup>5</sup>His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”  
<sup>6</sup>Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of  
purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. <sup>7</sup>Jesus said to them,  
“Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim.  
<sup>8</sup>He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the chief  
steward.”  
So they took it.  
<sup>9</sup>When the steward tasted the water that had become wine,  
and did not know where it came from  
(though the servants who had drawn the water knew),  
the steward went to the bridegroom <sup>10</sup>and said to him,  
“Everyone serves the good wine first,

and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk.  
But you have kept the good wine until now.”  
<sup>11</sup>Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee,  
and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

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