

ZIONSVILLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**REV. JIM CAPPS- MAY 20, 2012**

“WHAT IS THAT TO YOU?”**JOHN 21:20-24**

There are three “c’s” which somehow seem to play an important part in the way in which we operate as individuals and as a culture. The first is **Comparison**. Think of the numbers of times a day you compare yourself to others at work; to the young, handsome or beautiful actor/actress in the advertisement; the house you live in or the car you drive with the others in the group you hang out with. And the list goes on and on.

The second “c” is **Competition**. Frankly, as an old athlete, I love competition which plays an important part in several areas of our lives whether in healthy or unhealthy ways. While our system of capitalism is built on healthy competition, it becomes unhealthy when our desire to gain a competitive edge causes us to be unethical and lose our moral compass. When we try to compete with the possessions of the people in our neighborhoods or social settings to the point that we are in over our heads in debt, we have lost a healthy perspective.

The third “c” is **Control**. We desperately want to control the lives of those we love to shield them from harm or to manipulate them to accomplish our purposes. In a world filled with uncertainty and rapid change, we deeply desire to control our futures, whether we are talking employment, finances, or health.

Let me try to illustrate what I mean by these three “c’s” by sharing a story about an anonymous telephone call not long after I arrived as an assistant pastor at the first church I served after I was ordained. I was working alongside of an experienced senior pastor who was very different than me. He had the reputation for being a political activist who was a lot farther left of me on the political/philosophical spectrum. He had been thrown in jail in Mississippi for trespassing on public property while trying to enlist blacks to register to vote.

The caller who would not give her name asked if I might preach every Sunday in the first service and let the senior pastor preach in the second. As she talked she was comparing us and really trying to put us in a situation where we would compete against each other. In so doing, she was hoping that the people who believed the way she did would be able to control what the church would become.

In what I believe was a Spirit-led response toward the beginning of the conversation, I told her that my colleague and I met together at least weekly to share and pray with each other. Anything she said to me, I would have to share with him and we would pray for wisdom together. While she kept talking, for quite some time after my clarification, she soon realized that she would not be able to drive the wedges of comparison and competition between us. She could not control the future of the church.

I’ll never forget overhearing a conversation while standing behind a couple of men at a Presbytery meeting where it had taken nearly an hour to discuss the formation of a transitional co-pastorate with the two of us. One man said to the other, “As a presbytery we are set up to deal with conflicts, but we

don't know how to handle two people who love each other and want to work together." By God's grace and the leadership of the Spirit, we were able to put aside comparison, competition, and control and bring honor to God through the way we worked together, even though we were two very different people.

As we finish this series on "Basking in Resurrection Light," and look at the end of John 21, the setting is the shore of Galilee just after Jesus has forgiven, re-commissioned and called Peter a second time. Somehow, I think those 3 "c's" are very much at work in Peter, the impetuous fisherman.

Let's read together, John 21:20-24.

IN VERSES 20-21, PETER EXPRESSES A CONCERN FOR YOUNG JOHN, THE DISCIPLE AND AUTHOR OF THE GOSPEL.

I picture Jesus and Peter getting up from the breakfast on the beach around the fire of coals and beginning to walk together. Peter is physically following Jesus. As he looks over his shoulder, Peter notices that young John, who is probably still a teenager, is also following. After Jesus' betrayal, when the rest of the disciples had scattered, John had followed Jesus to the high priest's compound for the trumped up trial. Furthermore, John followed Jesus to the cross, a place where none of the other disciples had gone. John has not needed to be called a second time. He is still on the journey, following Jesus.

Peter's concern for him could be from several motives. At first blush, we might say that Peter might be comparing himself to John as he asks Jesus "Lord, what about him?" Peter hasn't followed as faithfully as John. John, in his youth, has an innocence and purity about him which could have been a little disarming to the Big Fisherman. Peter could have wished that he had the same kind of uninhibited passion of John. Maybe there is insecurity on Peter's part as he compares himself to John.

Or, possibly, could it be that Peter was concerned about John's ability to take care of himself when the danger and rigor of following Jesus would make life risky and treacherous. Would Peter have to watch out for John in the same way Jesus may have cared for him in their three years with Jesus?

Peter seems to be one of those guys who wants to know as much as possible. The more information you have, the better you are equipped to face and even control the future. Would John be a Co-Shepherd of the early church with him? Would they be competing for the same position? Who would be the greatest?

In a brotherly, almost paternal manner, Peter might have been concerned about how John would die. Jesus had just predicted that Peter would die with his hands stretched out on a cross. As the reality that he has been called to come and die for Jesus was sinking in, Peter might have been genuinely concerned about John's future well-being. Would John also die for Jesus? If so, how would he meet his end?

While comparison, competition and control were all certainly a part of Peter's make-up, I would give him credit for asking the question, "Lord, what about him?" in genuine concern for the future of the young disciple.

IN VERSES 22-23, JESUS RESPONDS TO PETER'S QUESTION WITH "WHAT IS THAT TO YOU."

Regardless of why Peter asks about young John, Jesus responds very decisively. Unlike us sometimes when we are afraid of coming on too strong or hurting someone's feelings, Jesus knows Peter better than he knows himself. He meets him in a way that is going to be most helpful to him. If Peter is comparing himself to John in any way, Jesus is saying that he's heading down the wrong path. Whether his comparison is positive or negative, God has created Peter and John as unique individuals, each with a particular purpose, and they should not be compared.

If the Big Fisherman is feeling competitive and concerned about future status, position, or prestige in Christ's Kingdom, Jesus is letting him know that he clearly is out of bounds. God is the One who makes those determinations and not Peter.

If in any way, Peter wants to somehow try to control John and his future, that's not his job. God is the One in ultimate control and not Peter. While Peter may be like many of us and want to be in charge, making things happen, God is in control of John and will do just fine, thank you.

Even, as I surmised, thinking about his own death for Christ, Peter is compassionately concerned about John's future and possible martyrdom, Peter needs to leave John's future well-being in God's hands. In life and death, God will take care of John and use Him any way He chooses. If he is to be like Elijah and not die until Jesus returns, "Peter, what is that to you."

Then in a very helpful way, Jesus moves Peter's attention from John to focus on himself once more. When Jesus says to Peter, "You must follow me," He is saying. "What happens to John is none of your business. It's mine." Peter's most important responsibility was to be faithful to his call to follow Jesus. It's as if He is saying, "Don't be concerned about him. You need to be concerned about yourself and your call. Leave John up to me."

I have a feeling that however these words were spoken, they weren't easy for Peter to hear. Yet, there also had to be something liberating about the fact that even though he was going to be the shepherd, he wasn't in control of anyone's destiny or controlling anyone's future.

It is interesting to note that because of Jesus' words here, a rumor spreads that John would not die until Jesus returned. Now you must understand that most people of that day believed that Jesus would probably return in a matter of months or a few years at the most. They didn't understand that it would be more than 2000 years and counting.

These words at the end of John dispel that rumor. Some would say that they are an addendum written after John's death. But that young teenager who faithfully followed Jesus as He talked with Peter that day did outlive all of the other disciples who met violent deaths at the hands of their oppressors. John took Jesus' mother, Mary, as he had been instructed from the cross, and became the leader of the Church at Ephesus, a major city on the coast of what we now know as Turkey. John would go on to write three letters which are included in the Bible. Then as an old man when exiled to the Island of Patmos, would have a great dream from which came the Book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible. Unlike the other disciples, he would die a natural death.

As I said last week, Peter would become the Shepherd of the Church and Saul whose name would become Paul, would become the Missionary Statesman and Evangelist. It was God's destiny for John

to be the Witness who would faithfully communicate the good news about Jesus to all who would
 l i s t e n .

APPLICATION

Several years ago, Alice and I met our daughter, Becky, who was then a pastor in Spartanburg, South Carolina, in the beautiful city of Asheville, North Carolina. We were going to celebrate her 30th birthday by going to the Biltmore House and then participate in their favorite sport- shopping. We stayed in a nice hotel right on the main highway going from the interstate into Asheville, right around the corner from the Biltmore.

We were staying in a room with two queen-size beds. So in the morning, I did my usual thing. I got up before they were awake, quietly got dressed in the dark and then started out for the bagel shop across the highway from the hotel. I can always spot bagel and donut shops since I am the designated breakfast provider for my girls.

As I walked out of the hotel into the sunlight, I felt very strange. My vision was blurred. I hoped I hadn't had a stroke or some kind of other episode that would diminish our time with Becky. Hoping that it would clear up, I walked across four lanes of congested rush hour traffic. As I walked into the shop and looked at the menu showing various offerings of delectable goodies, I panicked. I could not read the letters or the numbers. I was in big time trouble in a strange city to boot.

As I took off my glasses to rub my malfunctioning eyes, I noticed something strange. They were not my glasses. They were Alice's glasses. I could see better without them. So as not to look too strange, with great relief, I put them back on again and walked back across the busy highway, in the hotel, up to my room, and exchanged the glasses. I was healed! With that new outlook on life, I walked confidently across the busy highway and secured breakfast for my girls.

When I told them my perilous tale, they chortled and said that I must have looked just like the cartoon character, Mr. Magoo. At the moment, I can't say that I was as amused as they were.

Dear friends, the lens through which we view life as we follow Jesus is of utmost importance. If we look at our lives through the lens of comparison, we are prone to look too highly or too lowly at ourselves. We can think we are better than others and come across as arrogant, forfeiting opportunities to point people to Jesus, the primary purpose we were called to follow in the first place.

Likewise, when viewing life through the lens of comparison, we often think of others being better than ourselves. Sisters and brothers, God made you just like you are! He doesn't make junk! It's an insult to God when you put yourself down, when you don't think you are as good as someone else. We are following the subtle ploy of the Evil One when we look at life through the lens of comparison. Each one of us is uniquely created, gifted and called by God for a purpose. We do not have the right to compare ourselves with anyone!

Similarly, we must not view our lives through the lens of competition. In God's scheme of things, we don't have to compete with others for God's attention or rewards. God deals with each one of us as individuals. He calls each one of us for a particular purpose. There is nothing we can do to make God love us less and nothing we can do to make God love us more. We are each responsible for

faithfulness to God who created and called us and we don't have to compete with others for His acceptance and love.

It is also important to note that we must not view life and others through the lens of control. We were never given the task of controlling the outcomes of events or the lives of those around us. When we attempt to control situations and events we are trying to play God, a role that you and I will never be successful in filling. There are so many things in life that are completely out of our control. That's part of God's intention as the Master Designer of all that is. We must let God be God, always relinquishing our lives to His control. There's a real sense of freedom when we submit ourselves to God and don't feel like we have to control others.

My dear friends, I believe that God wants to say to each of us again as He did to Peter, "Follow me!" As we look around at the others, and try to think of words to describe what that looks like, my mind goes to Hebrews 12:1-2, when the writer uses the analogy of the Olympic race, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us lay us throw off anything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

The key is "keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus" and not on comparison, or competition or control. Whenever I read those verses my mind goes back to my senior year in high school and standing next to the track cheering on my friend who was running the finals heat for the high hurdles, trying to qualify for the state finals.

My friend, Rod, was one of the best natural athletes I have ever met. He and I both participated in 4 sports a year, which you could do in a small high school like the one we attended. As a freshman, in December, a TV station named him the player of the week in basketball for all of Southwestern Michigan. He was starting quarterback in football and a shortstop/pitcher in baseball. His best sport, for which he would surely get a college scholarship, was track. He went to state in both high and low hurdles as well as long jump, his freshmen year.

I'll never forget a cool, crisp October evening in a football game during Rod's sophomore year when his knee was severely dislocated. It took a long time to rehab and he couldn't compete in the hurdles during his sophomore and junior years. Both of those years he went to the State meet in the quarter mile. Finally, his senior year, he was back in the hurdles and running one of the best times in the state.

This is where we came in. He had won his preliminary heat in the high hurdles with a better time than any of the others. The starter's gun went off. He shot out into the lead and was ahead of the other hurdlers by a good distance. But instead of keeping his eyes focused on the top of the final hurdle and the finish line beyond, he turned quickly to see how far ahead he was from the second place runner. Even though it was only for a split second, he hit the final hurdle and fell in a bloody heap on the then cinder track. Not only did he never finish the race, but he took out the runner in second place.

Dear friends, that's exactly what Peter was doing when he looked back at John and said, "What about him?" How about you? Are you looking at your life and the people of your life through the lens of comparison or competition or control? If so, hear Jesus say to you today, "What is that to you? You must follow me."

If you are struggling with comparison, competition or control, I would challenge you to honestly take that struggle to God. In a way uniquely you, God wants to use you to accomplish His purpose in His world just like He did with Peter and John.

If you would like to discuss your situation and/or would like to pray with someone, there will be members of our prayer team at the alcove by the cross after the service.