

Disability Message

Everyone Belongs

January 19, 2020

Lester Zimmerman, Stephanie Hubach, Darrell and Betty Eberly

Today is Sanctity of Human Life Sunday. We often take this Sunday to focus on the value of the unborn. We speak out against the horror and tragedy of abortion.

We are challenged to do our part to **speak up for those without a voice** and we offer compassion and healing for those who suffer from the guilt and shame of an abortion.

This morning I want us to focus on another Sanctity of Human Life issue and that is the value and treatment we give to those who have disabilities. Many of them also have no voice and need someone to speak for them. **My heart this morning is to help us understand what valuing them looks like.**

To help us this morning we will have several testimony stories of those walking this journey. **My desire is to help us become more sensitive, understanding and embracing of those who have disabilities and to see them as a valued part of our church family.** And to be supportive of the parents and families who are among us.

Mark 10:46-52 Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means “son of Timaeus”), was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” So they called to the blind man, “Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you.” Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him. The blind man said, “Rabbi, I want to see.” “Go,” said Jesus, “your faith has healed you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road. NIV

Several quick observations from this story:

1. Jesus values those being ignored.

Vs. 49 - Jesus stopped. He had important things to do and places to go. But by stopping he showed everyone where his value was. This blind beggar was worthy stopping for. This man was created in God's image and deeply valued.

Everyone else saw him as a beggar. But Jesus saw him as a prince. Jesus values everyone alike. The rich and the poor, the healthy and those with disabilities. And so should we.

2. Jesus calls people with disabilities to his side.

While people were pushing away those with leprosy and disabilities, Jesus had time for them. Others tried to marginalize and silence this man who was a distraction and who was disrupting their group. But Jesus didn't see this man as an embarrassment or distraction. This man whom others regarded as a nuisance and tried to silence, was noticed, loved and ultimately healed by Jesus. Jesus includes people with disabilities at his table of friendship.

3. Jesus listens to the longing of their hearts.

Jesus took time to listen to the deep cry of this man's heart. Some are not able to verbalize but Jesus hears their hearts. His spirit lives in them and I believe he communes with them. Spirit to spirit. More than we realize. In fact, sometimes the blind and deaf see and hear him more clearly than the rest of us do. Each person with disabilities is deeply precious and loved by God.

4. Jesus blesses every person.

Jesus healed this man. Jesus has something to impart to everyone. It isn't always healing, but it is always his love and value. It is his friendship and time. And hopefully it is the fellowship and inclusion in his church body. Someday we will see the full revelation of God's glory that is placed in every person with disabilities.

This is how Jesus responds. He values, he calls, he listens, and he blesses. How do you and I respond? Jesus wants to express his love and care through us.

My hope for us here at Petra Church is that we truly would consider all life sacred and valuable including those with disabilities. My hope is that we not only welcome those with disabilities with good accommodations and ministry support but that we embrace each person as a valued part of our family.

My hope is that each one of us continues to grow in our understanding and sensitivity to those we meet along the way who struggle with a disability.

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The first person I want to introduce this morning is **Stephanie Hubach.**

Stephanie Hubach is a Research Fellow in Disability Ministries with Covenant Theological Seminary and Visiting Instructor for Educational Ministries. She has served with Mission to North America’s Special Needs Ministries. She has also served on the Lancaster Christian Council on Disability. She has also served as the chairperson of the Lancaster County Mental Health/Mental Retardation Advisory Board as well as other ministries related to disabilities.

Steph and her husband Fred led the Special Needs Ministry at Reformed Presbyterian Church in Ephrata.

Steph is the author of *Same Lake, Different Boat: Coming Alongside People Touched by Disability*

Steph was planning to be with us this morning but instead had to fly out to be with a friend whose husband pass away. So she agreed to come in and record what she was planning on sharing with us.

SHOW VIDEO OF STEPHANIE

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I have also asked a couple from our church family to share this morning. **Darrel and Betty Eberly.** They have three boys and their oldest son, Brandon, has a disability. *I have asked them to help us understand what this journey has been like for them so we can better understand and support parents who have a child with disabilities.*

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Some ways to welcome people with disabilities

1. Understand the needs - Get to know them

Before you can minister to someone affected by a disability, you must understand his or her needs.

2. Relate individually

People with disabilities are not problems to be solved; they're relationships to be embraced. Talk to them. Don't be afraid that you will say the wrong thing.

3. Provide opportunities for them to serve

God's intention is for everyone in the body of Christ to be fully included, giving and receiving from one another.

4. Give encouragement

One of the most powerful means of ministering to families affected by disability is encouragement.

5. Plan events for children, youth and adults with people with disabilities in mind.

6. Teach your children to befriend kids that are different from them

Regardless of their level of cognition, kids love when people include them, talk to them and spend time with them.

7. Network for support

As a church we can offer support to these families. We can make a huge difference in their lives by coming alongside of them.

Here is one way you can make a difference through our SNAP Ministry.

SNAP VIDEO

Closing Comments

Snap is asking for you to consider helping one service a month. We should not have to turn people away because we don't have enough buddies to help during the services. Please pray about this. – VISIT THE TABLE IN THE ATRIUM

Thank you for welcoming and embracing those with disabilities. This is a growing part of Petra and our ministry into the community.

Closing Prayer/Ministry Time - Stand

- Thank God for each person - those with and without disabilities
- Prayer of strength for parents and care givers
- Prayer for buddies and friends who care and understand and support
- Prayer that we would not only accommodate but we would make each person a valued belonging part of our church family