

This sermon had many images that accompanied it.

Sermon series intro: This last month, we as a church have begun living into the grant we've received to "love our neighbors" with "God is On the Move." (Perhaps you've heard of this. . .) One introduction to this has been an exploration in worship of "love God, love neighbors and love yourself." This love is the basics of Jesus' greatest commandment, in Matthew 22:36-40. You know this story, a lawyer wants to question (ok, trick) Jesus and he asks Jesus, which is the greatest commandment. Jesus' answer is "the greatest is to love God, with all of who you are" . . . but then Jesus goes on and says, "and a second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as you love yourself." Often this is shortened to "love God, love people."

Loving yourself sometimes gets the short stick in these conversations, which is unfortunate. If your own cup is empty, how can you pour out love on others? So today, I'm going to chat for a few minutes about how we remember to love ourselves.

This means I need these guys.
(image of characters from Inside out)

Does anybody recognize these guys?

Right, they are from "Inside Out" a Pixar movie from a few years back. The movie tells the stories of the emotions that guide a young girl's life (her name is Riley) as she moves from the wonderful land of Minnesota to the unusual land of San Francisco. If you have not seen it, do so immediately. In the movie we learn that each of these guys is important, and has an important job in our brain.

Usually Joy runs things. If one of the other feelings takes the reigns of the ship for too long, our bodies don't work as well.

In Inside out, Sadness takes over Riley's brain and she misses her friends and her home (who wouldn't miss Minnesota). Everything in her life seems to go wrong and it seems like she'll never be happy again.

While Disgust is helpful in recognizing a bitter food might be poisonous, disgust also shouldn't be in charge for too long. Sarcasm and eye rolling are common traits of disgust. In "Inside Out," disgust becomes more active once Riley reaches puberty.

What does it look like when fear is in charge?

There's a reason the Bible says over 300 times to not be afraid— fear is powerful driver for many of us. How about Anger?

What happens when anger is in charge? I know people where anger drives the body and it is exhausting. Maybe you do too.

Fear or anger or might cause us to blurt something out, like "Who do you think you are? This is different from what I know to be true? You're not God!"

It's true that when Jesus began to speak and preach and teach and heal lots of people questioned what he said and did. He was breaking long standing rules and traditions. The truths he spoke were hard to hear. Many people weren't sure if he should be trusted.

In Capernaum, one man has enough and blurts out “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.” For all we know, he said what so many of them might have been thinking. With anger and fear in charge, he raises a ruckus.

Fortunately, Jesus knows that what this man has said is not who this man really was. God sees into our heart. In Jesus’ day, anything that threw a person off balance was called an “unclean or evil spirit.” Something else was in the way of letting the joy and love get out, and so Jesus kicks that spirit out.

Oh I need Jesus.

I need Jesus and the Holy Spirit to sort through the voices in my head,
day and night.

Oh I need Jesus.

Do you need Jesus?

I know I’m not the only one who needs Jesus to help me sort out what’s going on in my head. I’m grateful for this story in Mark, when Jesus casts the unclean spirit out of the man. This scene in Mark reminds me that the Spirit wants to, yearns to help our minds find peace and joy. When something is wrong in our heads, God wants us to be well.

This story in Mark. . . This story reminds me to check my head for what’s unhealthy or unhelpful. I wish I knew what happened next!!! We don’t know what happens to this guy in Capernaum.

I bet that voice tried to keep sneaking back in. That’s how negative thoughts work. Maybe this man continued to question Jesus and the Jesus movement all along the way.

Maybe a decade later, maybe this man from Capernaum was living in Corinth and went to his gathering of fellow Christians and asked, hey, is it ok for a Christian to eat meat in the market that was sacrificed to pagan idols?

He knows this idol meat is cheaper, and he sees Christians eating it. He knows a rules following Jew would never eat that meat. So why are Christians doing it? (Remember, back then Christianity and Judaism were in the process of finding separate ways.)

Evidently this was a question that came up often enough that Paul had to answer it. And Paul’s answer, written to the people in Corinth was . . . well, it depends.

And here is where I see Paul taking on a different kind of role.

(a crucial image here was a stick figure gal on a couch, like a therapy session)

P: “This meat, sacrificed to idols. It’s a real problem for you.”

M: “Yes! It’s just wrong! All these people are so wrong!”

P: What happens when you are at the table with people eating this meat?

M: Well, I just get so angry! I glare at them. I don’t touch my own food. I try to not go there to eat again.

P: Interesting. Have you tried telling them how you feel? That the meat makes you uncomfortable and you have a really hard time around it?

M: No.

P: What if you did? What if you were open about your struggle with idol meat and asked them not to eat it?

M: Hmm.

Eating idol meat might not be your struggle. Your struggle could be drinking too much, working too much, and not being able to say no. It could be getting stuck on the couch or afraid to throw anything away. It could be unhelpful ways of thinking.

What do your internal voices say?

“If I’m not perfect, then I have failed.”

“They don’t really want to hang out with someone like me.”

“Everything that went wrong today was all my fault.”

Familiar?

If Mark 1, with Jesus and the man in Capernaum teaches us that God wants to help us with the voices in our head, **then Paul’s letter to Corinth** reminds us that we aren’t in this mind-rearranging alone. If someone around us struggles with meat, and you know they struggle, don’t eat the meat. Help a sister out.

Do your people know what you struggle with? Not just your therapist, but your friends, your kids. The unhelpful ways of thinking that plague you? Have you told them?

Friends, we are in this together.

Professional therapists help us.

Family members who ask us if we’ve been to the gym this week help us.

AA sponsors help us.

Friends who ask us if we’ve been out of the house this week and invite us to dinner help us.

Partners who insist on hearing about the good parts of our day help us.

That is God at work in those people who help us sort through the voices in our heads.

I hope at this point you are thinking about people, people who help you and the people you help.

This is God’s work we do and this is God’s love we receive.

It can be very hard to love ourselves, especially when the thoughts in our heads try to convince us otherwise.

Remember, we do best when joy is in charge.

But we do well to remember, God tells us to love ourselves and God helps us to love ourselves.

And so, May we seek God’s love,

even for,

especially for, us.

Love God, love neighbor, love self. Amen.