

Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
March 16 &17, 2013
John Crosby
The Essential Teachings of Jesus: Do Unto Others
Luke 6:30-32; Matthew 5:43-48

Jesus says,

9 "Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? **10** Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? **11** If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! **12** So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets." [Matthew 7:9-12]

Do to others what you would have them do to you. People who never darken the doors of the church know about the Golden Rule. They can recite it. It has become part of our culture and yet, even people who go to church every single morning and hear this and believe it and practice it, know that we live in a world that does not do to others what it would have done to them. We live in a world where loving others is hard. This is the core of Jesus' teaching. Remember, we talked about how at the very essence of Jesus' teaching is the *Shema*.

29 ... 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. **30** Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' **31** The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' [Mark 12:29-31]

This is how you love your neighbor as yourself. This is the very essence of the teaching of Jesus, but we live in a world where this is not practiced. Before we dive into that, if there are any kids that you want to have excused, that's fine. This is, I am sure, just PG-13 or PG, but you could have any kids go to class now if you would like.

I was reading about bullying. Physical bullying increases in elementary school, peaks in middle school, and then starts to decline in high school. Verbal abuse, on the other hand, not only remains constant, it keeps evolving. Verbal abuse keeps changing. Tony Campolo says that the Roman Catholics are correct. There is a purgatory, and it is called junior high. You are stuck between heaven and hell, and you don't know how you got there, and you don't know what you did to deserve it. It is a hard, hard time. Fifty-seven percent of students who experience harassment never report the incident. Fifty-six percent of students have personally witnessed some type of bullying in school but did nothing as the kids demonstrated to us. You see it all around you but you are afraid to do anything. Those are the numbers. Those are the news stories. We thought it would be helpful to put a face and a story to it, one of ours. They are *all* our children but this is one of ours. Folks, it's only going to be a movie on the screen.

(Video begins.)

Life with bullying started a little bit in elementary school, but I remember more in middle school being called some names. I don't remember exactly what I was called but I do remember kind of being picked on and whatever. Kids would say something like, "You have no friends" or whatever, and it was hard. I remember it a little more in eighth grade when I would get picked on, but ninth grade was where it really got kind of hard. Kids would say I have no friends and say stuff like, "You're a loser." "You aren't really worth anything" or whatever. Just really put me down like, "You're gay" or whatever. One kid actually drew some stuff in pen on my jacket. It was just hard.

One time I remember just going home and crying. It was tough. I would kind of try to escape with Xbox. I would go home and just play and not like care about school or homework. I didn't ever want to hurt myself or I didn't ever think about taking my own life, which can happen for a lot of people, but at the time I definitely felt like, "This sucks" and I mean, "I don't want to deal with this anymore." I talked to my parents and we knew some friends who had gone to this school in Chaska, Southwest Christian. I ultimately made the decision to switch and go there for the rest of my high school career.

The best thing that my parents did for me was, they were there for me. I would say to parents, be involved in your kids' lives. Don't think that even if your kids look like they are okay, it doesn't mean they actually are. Ask them how their day was and constantly be involved in their lives and if you hear that they might *be* bullying someone, talk to them about it. Don't put them down for it. Try to solve it with Scripture and through God.

And if your kids are being bullied, just comfort them. Let them know that things will be all right and if there are other options for school, give them those options because it definitely helped for me. I make mistakes and I don't always treat people like I want them to treat me. I guarantee that's with everyone. But being bullied has definitely made me think I don't want to put someone down or call them names because I didn't like that at all. And if I do make a mistake, apologize with the phrase, "Do unto others as you want them to do to you." I think that has definitely played a big role in my life, just how I should treat people and treat my friends and treat strangers because you never know how they are truly feeling.

(Video ends.)

Okay, so I married this mom and dad. I baptized little Matt, not so little Matt. When this came up, the parents were naturally distraught, and they said, "Well, what do you do? What do we do?" And I said, "Well, I've got these Bible verses, and this is my expertise here. I try to show how God comes into all of our lives, but you are the ones who take it out into all of our lives." We have teachers here and nurses and counselors who live out their faith out there and see bullying expressed and dealt with each day, and so I thought I would take ten minutes out of our time here and ask somebody who is a follower of Jesus and a professional educator to help us with this idea of bullying.

Bruce Locklear, why don't you come up. Bruce, is the principal at Edina High School. More important, he is a follower of Christ and he cares deeply about kids of all ages. He sees this day in and day out. One of the kids came up to me and said, "Is it true that Dr. Locklear," he didn't say that, he said, "Doc Loc," that's what they call him. "Is it true that Doc Loc, the principal, is

going to be here?" I said, "Yes, he is." And the kid goes, "Oh, that's so great. You know, when I get to high school, I get to have him, too." So we are blessed in that sense.

Bruce, as an educator and a Christian, when you hear about somebody getting bullied, what do you advise them to do?

(Dr. Bruce Locklear:) It's a very tough situation, and first of all, I wish to thank you because the first step is always awareness. I'd like to start with a story, John, of probably what *not* to do. When I was in seventh grade, as seventh grade boys will do, we tended to hang out by the water fountain during lunch. This kid by the name of James Taylor would always come up and grab my arm and twist it. Not the singer. This was a bully James Taylor. I was standing there one day and he grabbed my arm and was really cranking on it, and I started crying. And when you open that door, you really open the floodgates. I was about this tall, a very healthy young man, so I got all the band kids as well so.... But I remember going home on this particular day and my dad saw my arm was bruised and he said, "Don't take that anymore. What are you doing?" He said, "Punch him if he does it again." So I go to school the next day and I think, 'Oh, gosh, am I really going to do this?' and "Will I take a worse beating than before?" So anyway, again, the kid grabs my arm and starts twisting and I shut my eyes and just deliver a punch. Of course, the teacher on the playground sees me, and I get in trouble and here we go. So let me start by what *not* to do, and I'll try to keep this as bulleted as I can just to keep it concise.

- As a parent, don't push retaliation in a bully situation. As evidenced today, this puts your kids in a situation where they feel like they have to defend themselves. Stay away from that.
- Now the second thing is, avoid counter-bullying scenarios. Oftentimes as a parent, you will say, "Get your buddies and gang up on him." Stay away from that. Violence versus violence is a no-win situation.
- And the third thing is, as parents, I used to do this all the time but I really try to avoid it, saying, "When I was your age...." You may have been their age, but it is a very different time now, and so really try to refrain from these three things.

But in response to your question, John, I'd like to share some very specific things. The first one is communication. In the whole world of parent/teen/middle school/high school student, communication is so important. It takes a lot of work. Invariably, you sit down sometimes and you try to talk to your teenager and it's like, "Really, I have no interest in talking to you." But really try to stay on that and try to build that relationship because when times are tough, you have to be the No. 1. person they can rely on.

The second thing I try to assess as a school administrator is, is it bullying or is it a disagreement? I really try to listen carefully and I look for two things. First of all, I look for the intensity of the situation, and second, the frequency, because in a situation of a disagreement versus a bullying, those require two very different measures on a parent's part as well as a school administrator's.

The third point that I strongly recommend is, get help. As a parent, get help. As soon as you detect it or think about it or even suspect it, call the school. Talk to a counselor. Talk

to an administrator. We will help, and we will do anything we can to help but we have to know about it. If we don't know about it, we can't do anything about it.

And the final thing that I would suggest is empathize. Kids don't ask to be bullied. And so as a parent or a school administrator, when you go into this conversation, listen a lot more than you talk.

(John Crosby:) Bruce told me we don't want to ask, "How was your day?" We want to ask open ended questions that draw the kids out into sharing what their life is feeling like. That's just huge. Bruce, as many of you, was bullied as a kid in the traditional way that we think of bullying, getting beat up, getting mocked, having something happen to your locker or whatever. But bullying, while it is as old as the Scriptures, keeps changing its face. Our kids deal with a different kind of bullying every time they have access to the internet. Cyber bullying is huge, rampant, not just in Edina, but all over. How do we cope with cyber bullying?

(Dr. Locklear:) Dealing with this sometimes is like drinking from a fire hose. You just can't truly digest everything that goes into it. I'd like to start by rendering a very simple definition around it—using technology, basically, to harm another person or to harass another person. So some of the things that I talk about are the examples around us. Parents, when I say these things, if you don't know what I'm talking about, just raise your hands. So listen carefully. Web pages? Do you know what that is? Chat rooms? Discussion groups? FaceBook? Text messaging? InstaMessaging? My favorite: SnapChat? Twitter? All right. There you go. These are all realities that the cyber bullying can take place in. I'm not going to spend a lot of time talking about each one, but it's important to really begin to understand them.

When I deal with these things, my first rule is: I try to be and know everything that a 16-year-old knows. And that requires a lot of research because it has been a long time since I was 16. Nothing is worse than if a student comes into my office and says, "You don't get SnapChatted up?" If I stand there and say, "Huuuh?" I lose my street cred with the students, so I have to really know what they are talking about. So the first step in cyber bullying is: Get smart. Know what is going on. Know what is out there, but most importantly, know what your students use and note *how* they are using it. That can be a very difficult situation, John, because the counter to that is, the proliferation of technology in schools. We are relying more and more on technology in terms of the education of our children so it can be a double-edged sword.

The other thing is to really understand the fact of who pays the technology bills. One of the things that our police liaison talks a lot about when we get into these cyber bullying situations is: "Parents, you are paying the bills...." It's like, "Ohhhh." It's not necessarily a right that your child has at all. There are many ways to begin to navigate through that, but probably the best advice I can give a parent is to be aware of the technologies that your kid is engaged with, understand what they are, and learn how to talk some of that language.

(John Crosby:) Bruce and I are both dads of daughters and have both had the "You don't understand" conversation with them. Bruce said something last night that I thought was

just huge. "Sometimes we try too much to be their friend". What is the end of that sentence?

(Dr. Locklear:) Well, the whole idea is, you just *can't* be their friend. When you become their friend, you begin to blur the line. I was talking to several parents last night. Students are very smart. They use the counterargument, "Well, you said I'm not your friend so I'm not going to talk to you about this." But the whole idea, really, is understanding that you are the parent. You are there to provide the support. You are there to provide the love, and the guidance. The friendship thing can get very blurred very quickly.

(John Crosby:) We don't want to leave you with the impression that this is impossible to deal with. If you are an observer, an aunt, a grandparent, a kid, or a parent, we believe there are effective strategies that help stop bullying but, to me at least, they are unusual. They are not the first thing you think of. I usually think, if the parent finally gets their act together, if the school finally clamps down.... Far less effective than what Bruce's research suggests is the most helpful for bystanders.

(Dr. Locklear:) As we deal with this and, again, at the high school level, much of what I see tends not to be in-the-face bullying. It tends to be the cyber bullying but in either case, I eventually go from using the term *bystander* to using the term *protector*. If you think about a situation of where we are 15 years of age and hanging out together. Little Julie comes up and I'm going to start bullying little Julie around. Bullies bully for a lot of different reasons. It could be power. It could be control. It could be recognition. But one of the biggest things, if you are one of those bystanders or protectors, it takes just one time for you to step up and say, "Hey! Really?" That's a big word these days, *really*. "Really? Knock it off!"

What the protector or the bystander does is cause it to end. The bullying is over because the bystander or protector has sent a message that this is not cool. And if you are in middle school or high school, being cool is the thing that you want. So, again, the whole idea of the protector is so important. We spend a lot of time talking to students when they come in, whether it is cyber bullying or face-to-face bullying, about identifying the protectors, identifying the bystanders. And if I can identify those people, I'll sit down with them and talk to them and give them strategies on how to intervene and how to do so in a manner that you don't get targeted, but can have a very effective manner of ending it.

The No. 1. thing that we tend to need is the whole idea of courage, John. We began the school year talking about courage. We are really doing a lot of different things in our school that require a lot from our kids. We talked about understanding that moment, that very moment that courage is needed, so that you would not be one of the 8 percent of people who stand by and watch something happen. If you convert that 8 percent into the reality of our school or the reality of our city or our town or our state or our nation, that is really stepping up to end this. It takes very strong courage and a very strong faith, but also a very strong focus. When we get people stepping up to end this, that's when you'll see the bullying decrease, subside, and move away.

(John Crosby:) This is why we ask the kids to do this. We say to you all the time and you smile and think it's cute, "Kids, students, are not the church of the future, they are the

church right now.” They are the ones sitting next to the child getting bullied, sitting next to the bully, sometimes tempted to be the bully. They are the ones we need to encourage and encourage to give courage believing that God is not only on their side but wants them to be on God’s side.

Brian, the school policeman at Edina High School, fabulous, young Christian man, Bruce, a follower of Jesus! I wanted to close this part by asking Bruce, how do you feel like the role of prayer and faith interacts with this whole idea of bullying along with loving others as you would be loved?

(Dr. Locklear:) In my job in general, prayer is just a big thing. I really try to do that every day, pray for the school and pray for the kids in our school and just that I hope that every child has an opportunity to go through the day, the week, their high school career and know they always have a home to come back to. And a part of that home is helping them understand that they belong to something much bigger than themselves. We encourage kids to get involved, but I’ve really thought a lot about the faith piece. The first part of that we alluded to already is courage. The courage to do something, and that is deeply rooted in faith, John.

I think the second thing is the hope, the hope that once you have that courage, it’s the hope that you can make a positive difference in the life of someone else. And then the faith comes in with the ability to stand firm.

(John Crosby:) I am not at all suggesting that our teachers or our administrators or our counselors or our police are perfect, but I literally thank God for people like Bruce who are there in the battle with us.

[Clapping]

Some of you grandparents came expecting to see a little musical or if you are here as a first-time visitor, good for you. This may feel more like a class but I’ve got to tell you, for those of you for whom this feels like a class on bullying, there are people who are sitting near you for whom this is a “Oh, please help me with this” kind of experience. And there are others who say, “Well, that’s great, but what next? Don’t raise my hopes and then say, ‘Okay, see ya next Sunday.’” We would like to believe that God wants to walk out of this sanctuary with us and help us and so we want to offer you some next steps.

Next step No. 1. is starting this Wednesday night, Becky Danielson, who is an elder here and a family expert, will be starting a course that is designed for parents, *Parental Guidance Necessary*. In anticipation of this, we put resources on our web site: www.cpconline.org/bullying. We hope that these things will be helpful. We have selected several books and put them in Pathway book store, and we hope, we pray, that God will use this to stir you up on whatever level God has in store for you, whether you are in school yourself, have one, love one, or are concerned about one. They are all our children.

As we close in prayer, I am struck by the idea that this is not only the holiest day of the year where we wear green and worship at Notre Dame, but we have a new pope, and I love Francis’ first Mass, coming out and saying that without Jesus, we are just another NGO [non-government

organization]. I want to pray with him and I want to pray for him, and I wonder if, as we think about our children and all of their children out there, we could pray together.

Lord, the election of yet another pope reminds us that You not only give us new chances but new leadership required for a new day. We do pray for our brother Francis and all the Catholic dioceses around the world that will have to learn his voice. I thank You for the way he is trying to live as a simple and humble follower of Jesus. I pray that rubs off on me. I pray that rubs off on our children who are stuck in a vat of excess, that they will learn to do to others as they would have done unto them. Lord, we lift up all of the vulnerable, the ones who are so vulnerable that they will hurt other people and be bullies, the ones who are so hurt that they will lash out and hurt others. We pray for the ones in fear of being bullied in school tomorrow and also, we thank You that You go with us and before us, that You go behind us to clean up our messes, and that You love our children, all of our children, in Africa, in Nordeast, in Edina, and in our homes. You love all of our children even more than we do. We ask You, Lord, to bless them in the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.