

For the Healing of the Nations Stewardship Sermon for 2009 General Assembly

Scripture: Revelations 22:2

Sub-theme elaboration: We all hope to experience God's healing and to be a part of His wholeness. Like a puzzle piece, we want to find a place to fit; to be able to use the gifts that are unique to us and help heal a fragmented world.

Call to Worship

O God, we live in a fragmented world

We search for a place to fit

Shower us with your love

Open your arms to hold our brokenness

Be our companion in a journey of faith

All: Heal us, teach us to extend the witness and help everyone to experience your redemptive love and wholeness in life.

Invocation

Breath of Heaven, refresh us this day. Fill our lungs with your life-giving spirit. We realize we are truly weary living in this fragmented world. Accompany us in our journey, grow our faith, and help us to find a place to fit; to be a part of your wholeness. May we experience the music, words spoken and communion this very day like never before. May we realize that the very seed is planted within each one of us to use our gifts for healing. This we pray in the name of Jesus whom we have come to know as our Christ, Amen.

Children's Sermon

(Items needed: puzzle pieces)

What do I have in my hand?

A puzzle piece

You are right. What do we do with puzzle pieces?

We use them to finish a puzzle

Have you ever been working with your parents or grandparents on a puzzle and discovered you are missing a piece; realized that you cannot finish without it?

Yes

What did you do?

We looked all over the house for it.

That's right. You can't finish the puzzle until you have every piece. Each piece is important. That is how God is with each of us. He created each one of us like we are that important, missing piece. Each of us is different like each of the pieces I am sharing

with you now but each is needed to finish the puzzle. Each one has a place to fit so the puzzle can be complete. Have you ever worked on a big puzzle?

Yes

How about a little puzzle?

Yes

Well, whether the puzzle is big or little, each piece needs to touch another to fit together. God wants that for all of us; regardless of what size the project we are working on, He wants us to work together and find the place to fit—not only for us but for everyone else.

Let's pray. God, may we always remember that you created each one of us and that while we are different, you want us to work and play together so that we all have a place to fit in your world. Amen

Hymn Suggestion

Page 609 in the Chalice Hymnal "Take My Life"

Offertory Statement

God, it is at this very table we come to be filled with your love and your healing. It is here we are reminded of how we were created in your image. It is here we recognize that to journey forth; to make a difference in a fragmented world, we must give of ourselves—we must share of the bountiful gifts that mean our very lives are shared out so that others may know your wholeness. Touch our hearts and hands. Make us instruments in your design to extend the witness.

Communion Mediation

It is written that Jesus took the bread, blessed and broke it and then gave it to the disciples. And likewise, he took the cup and when he had given thanks, he shared that with them. Our Christ again and again showed us how to give; groomed us to share and gave proof that we were special in God's sight. Out of the mosaic of all of life, he truly made a place for us to fit AND to be able to share our own unique gifts so that others may find wholeness as well. It is at this communion table that we are asked to remember; to be replenished and to go and serve.

Sermon: Healing the Nations—One \$5 Iron at a Time

A few years ago our younger daughter was working with her father on a puzzle. It sat on the coffee table in the living room waiting for the next passer by to notice a puzzle piece sitting all alone along the edge of that work surface and offer it just the right place to fit. Of course, that puzzle piece could not fit in just any open space that existed. No, that

puzzle piece had special edges, special colors that evidenced it was meant for *just the right place*.

Then as the puzzle was nearing completion over the next days and weeks, it became obvious that this project would never be done if we did not find that “**missing piece**.” It, of course, has slid under the edge of the nearby couch waiting patiently until someone noticed it was needed to finish the masterpiece.

I am reminded again of that puzzle when I read our text for today from Revelations. It goes right to the heart of healing and wholeness. Like that puzzle, many of us sit at the edges of life. Some of us wait patiently. Some of us scream out to be noticed. Some of us do not know what to do to help ourselves or others. But, regardless, each of us comes to a sense that down deep *until* we are a part of something whole, we can never reach our destiny; never chase away the loneliness or ever feel healed.

In a recent publication on home decorating (of all things) that came to my house by mistake, I read an article about five inspiring women. They were already leading the lives of caregivers for their families and friends but each had been prompted in unique ways to start a movement for wholeness in this fragmented world. All five saw a problem yet *refused to remain indifferent*. Each one suffered from problems that served as catalysts to seek solutions. Each one found that love is not only something you feel, but is something you **do**.

I want to share two of their stories. The first one comes to mind as a direct link to the scripture for today. In Revelations 22:2 we read “...And the leaves of the trees shall be for the healing of the nations.”

When Sharon was growing up in a neighborhood in Milwaukee, she was surrounded by sturdy old homes, plentiful gardens, large families and trees that extended their branches and leaves like canopies over it all. It is easy to picture the neighborhood, the families and to somehow sense the peace of it all.

Like many of us, she grew up, married and moved away to a different city and state. When she got the chance to move back to Milwaukee, however, she discovered that the years had not been kind to her childhood neighborhood. Now the area experienced prostitution, gangs and drug activity that resulted in fear and fatalities. Gone were the once stately looking homes. Houses were boarded up and empty lots were now filled with trash.

But there, like a puzzle piece under the edge of the couch, they found Emma who refused to move out of the troubled neighborhood even when she was shot at in the streets. Emma was the *missing piece* alright. She inspired Sharon, her husband and others. Together they organized for change—for healing. Now, more than 1,000 people help rehab old houses, build new ones, converting a drug house into a neighborhood center and yes, even planting trees. The urban canopy is once again there to offer shelter not only to Sharon, her husband and Emma but to others seeking healing and a place to fit.

Out of the fragments that Sharon found when she came back home and out of the strength of Emma who “stood her ground,” wholeness could be found again.

The next story led to the title of this message for you today. Becky was a busy mother of nine when tragedy struck. Her daughter committed suicide! How could this end of a precious life offer healing to anyone. But as Becky went through her daughter’s things, she discovered her loved one had been a lifelong champion of the underdog. She had been sending funds to an orphanage in India. Becky was touched and asked that memorials be given to the orphanage in her daughter’s name. Generous gifts came and Becky was actually asked to serve on the board of directors for the orphanage.

Sure, when Becky made her first trip to India she felt the 120 degree heat and certainly noticed all of the beggars who swarmed her cab. Many were leprosy-affected moving about somehow without limbs or eyes. Then it happened. The cab came to a stoplight and a woman without legs crawled up asking Becky not for help for herself but help *for her children*. The encounter haunted Becky in India and when she came home for she was puzzled how she could help. She was not a doctor who could heal and had certainly never run an organization that could pull efforts together to make a difference.

But Becky refused to be indifferent. She had fed and cared for her large family at the kitchen table so that is where she started. She invited friends to meet at that very table. It was there that she did, in fact, start her own organization which now works with 44 colonies of leprosy-affected Indians through support of education of children in India, a traveling medical clinic and a micro-loan program. And it is the micro-loan part of her work that has helped adults forsake begging and turn to starting their own businesses. One such woman learned how to gain independence with the gift of a \$5 dollar iron.

A young child working on a puzzle knows it. Each piece counts if you want to finish that puzzle. And, Sharon and Becky know it. This world is fragmented—here at home and across the miles. *Each of us* can find a place to fit in God’s masterpiece of healing and wholeness—whether we help turn a neighborhood around or place a \$5 iron in the hands of someone seeking to build up their own life. *We just have to refuse to be indifferent and use the unique gifts that God has given to each one of us.*

Before I close, let’s refer one more time to our scripture for the day from Revelations and ponder for a moment. If we are all the leaves on the tree of life, can we not each one offer our God-given and unique gifts and skills and together be a canopy of healing of the nations. Very likely, one of us here today is the missing piece that could help this congregation complete one of God’s masterpieces. It is you?