

Extreme Makeover: God is Stuck on You!
2 Corinthians 5:16-21, Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32
March 18, 2007

I have been overwhelmed this past week with your response to God's call for social justice on behalf of GLBT youth. I want to thank those twenty-two people, under the initiative of David K. Johnson, who have met and been exchanging information on this issue and the available community resources. The Holy Spirit (as David remarked in one of his emails) has indeed descended upon us "like a ton of doves." It is great to get back to Bering after our Spring Break vacation and check out my toolbox for what tool is available this week that applies to our spiritual disciplines that we are examining in my Lenten sermon series that I have entitled *Extreme Makeover*. This week I want to show you a tool that you may not have in your toolbox. It is one that I have recently added. This little tube of stuff is truly amazing at bonding and repairing all kinds of materials. It is **Super Glue**. Super glue deserves its name -- a single drop can permanently join your thumb to your index finger faster than you can say "Whoops," and a 1-square-inch bond can hold more than a ton. I have always wondered to myself how this stuff works, so I looked up its chemical processes this past week. The answer lies in its main ingredient, **cyanoacrylate** ($C_5H_5NO_2$, for you chemistry buffs). Cyanoacrylate is an **acrylic resin** that forms its strongest bond almost instantly. The only **trigger** it requires is the **hydroxyl ions** in water, which is convenient since virtually any object you might wish to glue will have at least trace amounts of water on its surface. White glues, such as Elmer's, bond by *solvent evaporation*. The solvent in Elmer's all-purpose school glue is water. When the water evaporates, the polyvinylacetate latex that has spread into a material's crevices forms a flexible bond. Super glue, on the other hand, undergoes a

process called **anionic polymerization**. Cyanoacrylate molecules start linking up when they come into contact with water, and they whip around in **chains** to form a durable **plastic mesh**. The glue thickens and hardens until the thrashing molecular strands can no longer move. Let me put this stuff away before I get into any trouble.

The work of Super Glue is like the work of the Holy Spirit. Like Super Glue coming into contact with water, when the Holy Spirit encounters humility in a human being amazing bonding starts to happen. Super glue actually changes the chemical makeup of the parties that are being rejoined. The internal attribute of humility changes our outward look so that we can be reconciled to others and to the world. If I am puffed up and superior to you, I see myself as better than you; in this case reconciliation is impossible. We must always be working on the inner state of humility. If we work on our inner chemistry, our outer makeup changes, our spiritual DNA becomes more perfect and loving and accepting of others different than us.

Another interesting application is the use of cyanoacrylate to **close wounds** in place of stitches. Researchers found that by changing the type of alcohol in super glue, from ethyl or methyl alcohol to butyl or octyl, the compound becomes less toxic to tissue. With further research, the practice may become more widespread and could eventually replace the need for stitching up lacerations. Now there is a sermon in there somewhere! Just like this future application of Super Glue, when we get the spiritual toxins out of us (that is when we overcome pride and get humble) the Holy Spirit is unleashed not only to bond us but to heal us.

The really good news for all of us is this: By God sending the Holy Spirit to be with us, God is saying, "I am stuck on you!" The waters of our baptism are the catalyst

of this process. Turn to your neighbor and say, “God is stuck on you! God will never let go of you!” That is really good news. God knows how to get the toxins out of you. Now also hear the challenging question for us. “What are we so stuck up about?” In other words why does our pride seem to get in the way of God working healing in our lives?

I want to look at our two New Testament texts this morning, from Luke and 2nd Corinthians, first to affirm that **God really is stuck on you**. Next we’ll look at how these texts also pose the question, “What are you stuck up about?” *First, God is stuck on you.* The parable of the Prodigal Son is the central text in the Bible on this point. The Prodigal leaves home for a faraway land and makes some really bad decisions. He hits bottom as he hungers over the food that the pigs eat. But in an instant he experiences the rushing waters of humility when “he comes to himself.” He returns the long road home practicing the whole way his apology and his humble request to be made as one of his Father’s servants. Notice this: the Father will not even hear all of his confession and humble request when he throws upon him new shoes, a new royal robe and throws a party to end all parties. He gives him not only a second chance, but says there is nothing more important than you my son being reconciled to me. All this is because God is stuck on you!

The apostle Paul says the same thing in more direct terms to the church in Corinth. Paul in this text has just reflected on death and how our death and afterlife is linked to Christ’s death and resurrection. He says, “If you are in Christ you are a new creation.” You are no longer to be thought of in a purely human way. Your life and my life are Super Glued to God through Christ. God has offered the ministry of reconciliation through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

You must know, however, that Paul was encouraging a church that was filled with petty divisions within its own ranks. Pride has infiltrated their ranks and those with ecstatic gifts of the Spirit believed that they were superior to those with so-called lesser gifts. In many other passages to the Corinthians directly asks the question, “What are you so stuck up about?” God has come down in Jesus Christ and reconciled you to God. You are a new creature. You now have free choice to no be petty. Go be Christ’s ambassadors and reconcile yourselves to each other. Learn to take this supernatural glue that I have given you, get the toxin of pride out, and get stuck to each other. Paul uses the Greek word for flesh called *sarx*. Now our bodies are good, but our fleshly nature keeps us down sometime. He says, “no longer think of your sister or brother in a fleshly way, but as a sister or brother of the risen Christ!”

Now none of us like to think of ourselves as the elder brother of the parable of the Prodigal Son from our gospel lesson, do we? The elder brother says I want nothing to do with this younger brother. I refuse to be stuck with him at all. The elder brother’s actions scream, “I am stuck up. I am totally self-righteous.” The Father pleads with his son, “I have stuck to you forever. I am totally stuck on you. Why can’t you see that you need to be stuck to your brother?” The curtain closes and the writer leaves the ending open-ended. We don’t know what future choice that the elder brother makes, do we? Just like the elder brother, we have a choice to make: we will be stuck to our sisters and brothers? Will we choose to be Christ’s reconciling ambassadors?

We here at Bering have declared ourselves a *reconciling* congregation. It is our mission statement. Reconciling people go beyond being open to the repair of broken relationships. Reconcilers humbly ask themselves the question, “what has been my part in

the broken relationship? What can I do to fix it?" How do we put back together what has been broken? We can nail it back together with the hammer of justice. Sometimes we hit our fingers rather than the nail. Or we can let God use the supernatural glue of reconciliation to heal and repair the relationship. Our part is to be willing and humble. God will then do the work.

Sometimes we just don't have enough humbling waters in our system because of fear or pride. That was my state many years ago in my friendship with John. John and I were both salesmen for the same computer services firm back in early nineties. John was one of the most intelligent and gifted salespeople I ever knew. He was also haunted by the demons of addiction. John and I started out as casual drinking buddies. We would have the most interesting theological debates over a pitcher of margaritas. For you see John was a self-avowed atheist and an articulate one. I could never make any headway with John but we maintained great respect for each other. A couple of years into our friendship John began to use cocaine. He quickly became hooked. He started becoming irresponsible in his business and personal life. He forgot appointments. He broke commitments to friends. His behavior scared and disappointed me. Finally he hit bottom and turned himself in for possession of cocaine. He served nine months in the County Jail. I was just off to begin my Seminary experience when I saw John at a reunion party of our old firm. John looked gaunt and more troubled than ever. He smiled at me and told me that he had read the Bible while in jail. I could see in his eyes that he wanted to be reconciled to me and to others who he had disappointed. But I was scared by the look of addiction that remained in his glance. I feared for my own safety and I coolly backed off renewing our friendship. Now I can stand here and justify my response to you today,

but I refused the opportunity to be stuck to this person who was finally responding to the gospel. Sometimes fear gets the better of us.

Sometimes pride gets the better of us. A childhood accident caused poet Elizabeth Barrett to lead a life of an invalid before she married Robert Browning in 1846. There's more to the story. In her youth, Elizabeth had been watched over by her tyrannical father. When she and Robert were married, their wedding was held in secret because of her father's disapproval. After the wedding the Brownings sailed for Italy, where they lived for the rest of their lives. But even though her parents had disowned her, Elizabeth never gave up on the relationship. Almost weekly she wrote them letters. Not once did they reply. After 10 years, she received a large box in the mail. Inside, Elizabeth found all of her letters; not one had been opened! Today those letters are among the most beautiful in classical English literature. Had her parents only read a few of them, their relationship with Elizabeth might have been restored. Who can forget these immortal words?

*How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.
I love thee to the level of every day's
Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints!---I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life!---and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.*

How could the genius that penned these words not persuade her own father to set aside his pride and accept reconciliation?

Sometimes, though, by the miracle of God's grace, reconciliation bonds peoples together suffering even the deepest wounds. Shortly after the turn of the 20th century, Japan invaded and conquered Korea. Japan was ruthless and brutal in its conquest. One group that they unleashed great hatred and intolerance toward were Christians. Churches were closed and church leaders persecuted. Congregations were refused the right to meet and worship. One pastor, after many pleas and acts of persuasion, was granted the right to reopen his church and hold one Sunday service. Koreans flocked from miles away and stuffed this tiny church. Koreans were famous for their passionate hymn singing. Song after song filled that little wood-framed chapel that Sunday morning. It was during a stanza of "Nearer My God to Me," that the Japanese police chief gave hideous orders. The police barricaded the church from the outside and began to douse the wooden church with kerosene. The church quickly ignited and smoke filled the burning building. There was a rush for the windows but those souls were ripped by a hailstorm of bullets.

The good pastor knew it was the end. With a calm that comes from confidence, he led his congregation in a hymn whose words served as a fitting farewell to earth and a loving salutation to heaven. Within moments the dying congregants united in the old hymn, "Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed?" Just before the roof collapsed they sang the last verse:

*But drops of grief can ne'er repay
the debt of love I owe:
Here, Lord, I give myself away
'Tis all that I can do!
At the cross, at the cross
Where I first saw the light,
And the burden of my heart rolled away --
It was there by faith I received my sight,
And now I am happy all the day.*

The hatred over that event lasted almost one hundred years. In 1972 a group of Japanese pastors visited the memorial marking the site of this tragedy. As they read the account of this horrible event, their hearts were filled with shame and remorse. There was an immediate outpouring of love from their Japanese sisters and brothers and \$25,000 was raised to build a new church on that site. At the dedication to the new church the air was still chilly between the Korean and Japanese congregations. After all, these were the grandchildren of monstrous killers. But when the music director closed the service with a singing of the hymn, “At the Cross,” the normally stoic Japanese could no longer contain themselves. They approached their Korean brothers, their faces filled with tears, begging them for forgiveness. The Koreans’ hearts were moved deeply as a wave of reconciliation filled that site that formerly had only known pain and hatred. God had sent the gift of reconciliation to a little church in Korea.

So how is it with you today? Are you stuck in some matter that needs reconciliation in your life? Perhaps there is a family member or former friend that needs you to use the amazing, supernatural glue that God has given you to repair relationships...to say to another “I will never give up on you! I am stuck to God and I am stuck to you!” As a church this next year is going to be a year of reconciliation as we follow God’s leading to reconcile and repair the United Methodist Church. Let us decide today that no matter the outcome at Annual and General Conferences that we can say to all of our sisters and brothers in Christ: “Forever, no matter what, I am stuck to you!”