

Proclaiming God's love

A few years ago I was preparing for a sermon and I was pondering how much God loves us, unconditionally. I wondered, how many times, in congregational life, we say that to each other? So as I continued to ponder the sermon I felt the Spirit impressing upon me to ask the people of the congregation to get up and greet each other and express to each other that "God loves you and accepts you just as you are." I really didn't know how people would respond to this request at the beginning of my sermon, after all, sermons are supposed to be listened to not necessarily acted out in the sanctuary.

On Sunday morning, when it was time for my sermon, I stood up and talked about God's unconditional love for each of us. I then asked the question, "How often do we say 'God loves you' to each other?" One of the basic beliefs of Christianity is that God is love and that God loves each of us. So I thought what is a belief without a practice? So I invited the congregation to stand and greet each other and say to each other that "God loves you and accepts you just as you are." I thought there would be some hesitation, but there wasn't any. The people got up and started greeting each other and telling each other that "God loves you and accepts you just as you are." As I observed this wonderful experience, a woman came up to me who was a member of a different congregation. I knew her and her circumstance of losing her husband recently and that she was having a difficult time. She told me that she had a dream last night that if she came to this congregation this Sunday that she would be affirmed. And, she added that she has been affirmed by the people and the message of God's love. She paid attention to her dream and took a risk to come and see, and she was blessed by God through the people.

Sometimes when I preach at other congregations I will ask the congregation to do the same ministry and I haven't been turned down or disappointed yet. We do this very well within our congregations. This is a tremendous gift that we can offer to others. For those congregations that participate in this ministry the follow-up question is "How many people live in your neighborhood that would long to be in this fellowship, and would long to be greeted and told that God loved them?" In the Doctrine and Covenants section 153:9b captures the answer to this question: "My Spirit is reaching out to numerous souls even now and there are many who will respond if you,

my people, will bear affirmative testimony of my love and my desires for all to come unto me." Do we have some resistance within us in sharing this vital message with those outside the walls of our congregations? If we are feeling this resistance within us, may we explore that resistance with God in prayer, in journaling, in discussion with a friend. If we can be unshackled from this resistance (fear) then we can find freedom in sharing God's love with others. What do we have to lose?

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