

Looking for Jesus, By Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. 09090802
Ephesians 4:1-16 and John 6:24-35
Elon Community Church, United Church of Christ, 2 August, 2009

My wife Sue and I had a wonderful time on vacation at our cabin in New York. There are many stories to be told from that vacation. What made it so wonderful was that we had our two daughters, their husbands, and our four grandchildren together. We had lots of fun adventures, but the one story that I choose to tell this morning, is the story of “mine.”

The word “mine” belongs to two-year olds. Cousins Brady and Miller are both now two years old. Sue, in her grandmotherly wisdom, had taken numerous toys with her. Then she asked me to bring along even more when I went up. Some of these toys were mine when I was a child, some of them were our daughters’, Emily’s and Maggie’s, when they were young girls. Some of them have recently been purchased and some were borrowed from friends, some of whom are parents and others of whom are now grandparents. It didn’t make much difference which toy Miller and Brady were playing with. If one was playing with a toy, the other wanted it, and thus began the duet of “Mine!”

See, the toy in the other two year old’s hands always looked more interesting. When Miller reached for Bert in Brady’s hand, Brady would yell, “Mine!” When Brady reached for Ernie in Miller’s hand, Miller would yell, “Mine!” It did not seem to matter to them that Sue or I would step in and say, “No, it’s not yours. It’s grandma’s, and grandma is sharing it with you.”

I have a very cute photo of Miller and Brady seated in a toy boat. It’s not a seaworthy boat, just a rocking boat with a throttle on the right and a steering wheel in front. The boat belongs to Sue’s friend. In the photo, Miller is smiling a beautiful smile. The back-story is that Brady was in the boat, playing happily. Miller simply stepped into the boat, sat in front of Brady, and displayed a huge satisfied grin of happiness. Then began the duet of “mine!”

Now, for free, I’ll share with you my wife’s solution to the two year olds’ malady of mine-itis. Young parents, and grandparents, listen up! In her wisdom, Sue went to the stove and grabbed the oven timer, the one that you turn, it ticks, and when the time is up, it goes ding. She said, “Now, you can rock in the boat, but you have to take turns. It’s yours for one minute. When the timer dings, you have to let the other have a turn.”

It was like magic. The timer would ding, and Miller would get up and out of the boat, and Brady would take his turn for one minute. And, vice versa.

I am struck with this story of “Mine!” Where did these two beautiful two year olds learn the concept of “Mine!”? Their parents aren’t like that. Their grandparents aren’t like that. Did they learn it from older playmates, one from California playmates, and the other from North Carolina playmates? Possibly. Is “mine-itis” a product of the United States of America, or is it produced world-wide?

Unfortunately, even though it should be, “Mine-itis” is not the sole province of two year olds. We hear it from adults. We hear it from churches. “This building is mine (or ours), and I don’t want to share it.”

As I drove home amid the news of the wrangling in Congress about reforming health care in this nation, I became convinced that the obstruction to reform is caused by a severe case of “mine-itis.” “I have health care, it’s mine, and I don’t want to share it.”

Or, “It’s mine, and I don’t want anyone messing with it.”

As I listened to “Talk of the Nation” on my drive, I heard Sarah Robinson of Vancouver, British Columbia, wonder why we in the United States were raising so much opposition to

universal health care. She was born and raised in California and had by now experienced both the U. S. and the Canadian health care systems. Explaining her satisfaction with Canadian health care, she made the very simple statement, “Canadians reach out to each other.”¹ What a concept!

It is a sin that in this country of ours, even though we use the excuse that we’re in a recession, there are forty-eight million citizens who have no health insurance. “Oh,” say those with mine-itis, “that’s an inflated number.” You know what, it’s a sin if in this country one million are uninsured. It’s a sin if in this country ten people are uninsured. It is a sin that our neighbors are forced to choose between paying for groceries and cutting their prescription pills in half. It is a sin that we have to pay emergency room expenses for those who should have publically-provided preventive health care. All we need to do is to reach out to each other.

The crowds that ran around the sea of Galilee were infected by a case of “mine-itis.” They were looking for Jesus. That sounds innocent enough, “looking for Jesus.” We need to look for Jesus in our lives, but we must be careful about why we are looking for Jesus or what kind of a Jesus we are looking for.

Jesus had left that side of the Sea of Galilee. He had literally escaped in the middle of the night. He knew that they wanted to take him by force ... and make him king.² Why? Because he had fed them the loaves of bread. Our story this morning in the Gospel of John follows that of the feeding of the five thousand. The crowds wanted manna the way their ancestors got manna from Moses. That is why they were looking for Jesus. They wanted him to feed them bread.

When they caught up with him, Jesus reminded them that it was not Moses who gave them bread from heaven, but God. It is God who gives the true bread from heaven. We are looking for Jesus, but we cannot call him “mine” as if we can possess him. Jesus is the bread of life, not because he can do the miraculous and keep our stomachs full, but because he can get us to share.

It’s not Jesus, as much as it is what Jesus showed us and taught us. He showed us that things don’t belong to us, they belong to God. If we believe in him and his ways, we will never be hungry. Jesus can get us to give up the terrible disease of “mine-itis.” What did Jesus have that was his? He didn’t have a donkey or a house or a bank account.

Jesus taught us to share. He fed five thousand people not because he performed a miracle, but because he called attention to a boy who was willing to share five barley loaves and two fish. Others saw it, and they said sheepishly, “Well, I suppose if that kid can share his fish and bread, perhaps I can share some of what I brought to eat.” A miracle happened. People shared and there was enough food left over to fill twelve baskets!

We gather around a communion table this morning to share the bread from heaven. We gather with those who have health care and with those who don’t. We gather with those who have food to share and with those who are hungry. We gather to break the bread of sharing. It is not mine. It is God’s, and God shares with us. If we receive it in that spirit, then there is enough for all to eat and be satisfied.

¹Sarah Robinson of Vancouver, B.C. on “Talk of the Nation,” National Public Radio, 7/27/2009

²John 6:13