

Sermon Series: TRANSFORMATION

Sermon: Love Does

Text: Mark 5

Discussion Questions:

Have someone read aloud the story of *The Star Thrower*:

Once upon a time, there was an old man who used to go to the ocean to do his writing. He had a habit of walking on the beach every morning before he began his work. Early one morning, he was walking along the shore after a big storm had passed and found the vast beach littered with starfish as far as the eye could see, stretching in both directions.

Off in the distance, the old man noticed a small boy approaching. As the boy walked, he paused every so often and as he grew closer, the man could see that he was occasionally bending down to pick up an object and throw it into the sea. The boy came closer still and the man called out, "Good morning! May I ask what it is that you are doing?"

The young boy paused, looked up, and replied "Throwing starfish into the ocean. The tide has washed them up onto the beach and they can't return to the sea by themselves," the youth replied. "When the sun gets high, they will die, unless I throw them back into the water."

The old man replied, "But there must be tens of thousands of starfish on this beach. I'm afraid you won't really be able to make much of a difference."

The boy bent down, picked up yet another starfish and threw it as far as he could into the ocean. Then he turned, smiled and said, "It made a difference to that one!"

- In what ways does this simple story carry such a powerful metaphor for life?
- How overwhelming can it be to think of trying to help large groups of people? Does the "it made a difference to that one" mentality serve as a useful metaphor for you?
- In what ways did the way that Jesus lived His life illustrate this story of the Star Thrower?
- Can you think of an instance in your life when you've been the young boy in the story? A time when you were the starfish? A time when you've been the old man?

Examination:

In Luke chapter 15, Jesus told three stories (parables) of things that were lost (think of Luke 15 as the "Lost Chapter"!). Break into at least three groups (*more than one group can work on the same parable*) to read and discuss these three distinct stories (lost sheep; lost coin; lost son). Use these questions - or others that come to your mind - to get to the heart of what Jesus was intending to teach us. Then come back to discuss the similarities/differences of each of the parables.

- What's the "big idea" of this story?

- Who is the hero of the story?
- Is there any connection between this story and the story of the starfish?
- What truth was Jesus wanting to teach in this story?
- Who is Jesus' intended audience in this story?
- What is one thing in this story that you can remember - and put into practice in your everyday life?

Come back together as a group and compare notes.

- What are the common themes that tie all three stories together?
- What are the differences in the stories?
- Is the intended audience the same in all three stories?
- What role does "rejoicing" play in these stories?
- What role do "friends and neighbors" play in these stories?
- Are there those who don't rejoice in the stories? Might that factor be a part of what Jesus is intending to teach?
- The third story (lost son) adds an interesting dynamic - that of the older brother. How does this dynamic factor into what Jesus might have been intending to teach?
- How did the way Jesus live His life model each of these stories?

Now read as a group **James 2:14-26**.

- Our theme today is "Love Does." How does this passage support this concept?
- Take some time to answer the question that James poses in verse 14... *"What good is it if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds?"*
- James immediately takes us to the illustration of a person who is hungry and poorly clothed. How is this scenario just as applicable today as it was 2,000 years ago when James wrote this?
- Is it reasonable to think of "Dead Faith" (v. 17) as the polar opposite of "Love Does" (v. 18b)?
- This passage alludes to how God views our "acts of righteousness". Is this something we should keep in mind? How important is it that God views what we do as a righteous act?

Application:

The application of this lesson brings us right back to the story of the Star Thrower.

Lost people matter to God. We can't be overwhelmed by the magnitude of the task. Jesus taught us that single, solitary lives mattered to Him. James teaches us that hungry, hurting people are our concern. Love doesn't just talk a good game - Love does.

Look for ways, each and every day, to put into practice this thought: *"It made a difference to that one!"*