

TITLE: "Twinkies and Root Beer"

TEXT: Matthew 7:12 (NT p. 7)

Introduction – "Finding the Sweet Spot" by Leigh McLeroy (*FullFill Spring 09*)

This past Monday at breakfast, Carol handed me a copy of the MOPS magazine *FullFill* and said, "This is a good article." It was "Finding the Sweet Spot" by Leigh McLeroy. In it she writes:

In baseball parlance, the sweet spot is the place on the barrel of the bat where contact with the ball results in the greatest hit speed and the least bat vibration. In other words, when a hitter connects on the sweet spot, his or her ball flies far and fast and very little energy is lost to resistance. [She goes on to say:] Since I have discovered baseball's sweet spot, I have spent many years looking for my own: the strategic spot where my best efforts, my God-given GIFTS and moments of well-timed opportunity converge for a satisfying-to-the-bone result.

As a successful single person, she has not found her sweet spot in her job, in marriage or in motherhood. Instead, she writes: "Life's sweet spot, it seems, is illusive. It is not a calling. It is not a career. It is, instead, an unscheduled convergence of elements over which I have little or no control."

She goes on to describe a couple of her sweet spots. One was mentoring a 17-year-old street kid who, after giving her all kinds of grief, called her on Mother's Day and said, "I know you're not my mother, but you're the closest thing I've had in a long time. Thanks for putting up with my stuff." ...Another happened at a women's retreat where a young mother who had lost a child shared her grief with her.

To me, sweet spots happen when I follow the Golden Rule; "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you." This is how Jesus tells us to love others; to picture yourself in another person's place and do what YOU would want done. Last week we heard about the Good Samaritan who helped the wounded man while others simply passed him by. If we are willing to BE a good Samaritan, God will provide us with an endless supply of fascinating people who have needs.

The risk of loving others

Helping those in need involves risk. All love, in fact, involves risk. In his *Confessions* (X, 9, 10), St. Augustine mourns the loss of his dear friend Nebridius. He writes: "...we feel such sorrow if a friend dies, such darkness of pain, the heart steeped in tears, all sweetness turned to bitterness, and for us a kind of living death because we have lost in death one who was alive." From his sorrow, Augustine concludes that we should not invest ourselves in anyone but the Lord, because anyone else will eventually die or let us down in one way or another.

This of course is true and, because I am a conservative person, this sentiment matches my personality. "If something seems too good to be true, it probably is." "Once burned, twice shy." "Don't put all your eggs in one basket." Considering the consequences before making a final decision is the way I am wired.

If we applied this conservative approach to love, we would say, "Watch out! Don't get into a relationship that may lead to heart ache." "Be careful who you trust!" "Don't allow yourself to be taken advantage of." This certainly makes sense ...but it about as far away from what God tells us to do as possible. C. S. Lewis writes (*Four Loves*, ch. 6):

To love at all is to be VULNERABLE. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping [your heart] intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket of your selfishness. But in that casket – safe, dark, motionless, airless – it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all dangers and perturbations of love ...is Hell.

You can try to limit your liabilities with your finances, but if you limit your liabilities with love, you lose love altogether. And, as Lewis points out, if you limit your liabilities with love long enough, and hard enough, you will lose love forever.

All love involves risk. When we commit to doing to others what we would like done to ourselves, we run the risks of being inconvenienced, taken advantage of and even resented for what we do.

The risk of loving God

There is a risk to loving God and it's one we ask for every week when we say in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." If we ask for God's will to be done, we are committing ourselves to being INVOLVED in God's will being done on earth, to carrying OUT God's will ourselves.

One of the things God asks us to do is to commit serendipitous acts of KINDNESS. I like the word serendipitous. It means making desirable discoveries by accident. That's the way opportunities for love and kindness come. And they almost always require that we give up something we have planned, or scheduled, in order to help someone. John Lennon said, "Life is what happens when we've made other plans." I say, "LOVE is what happens when we've made other plans."

Be OPEN to God's guidance. If you are driving down the road be AWARE of God's presence and if you think you should turn down a road, do it. If you are walking along a sidewalk and encounter a person and sense that you should talk to him or her, do it! If you have the inner conviction to give someone some money, do it! You might make a mistake, but who cares? Over time you will learn to discern God's direction from your own whims.

A lady attended church a few weeks ago and since I was talking to someone else, she slipped out without me having the chance to talk to her. Last Tuesday, I was working at my desk and had the sense that I should go get the church mail. I said to God, "Just wait till I finish this piece I'm working on," but the feeling persisted so I went. There was the lady I had missed sitting on a bench by the Post Office. We had a nice conversation and she said, I'm SO glad you stopped, there was a question I REALLY wanted to ask you."

A couple sweet spots from this past week.

The week before a vacation is very busy for me and this past week, I had just about every hour slotted with something that had to be done so that I could go. Monday morning was the time slotted for getting today's sermon done. I had just started when a Gadabout bus driver walked into my office and said she had a rider who wanted to get dropped off at our church for her coupons.

After calls to Ione Worth and Aiden Payne, I found out that a lady from Cooperative Extension was going to come at 11:00 to give out \$20 coupons for free fruit and vegetables at local farmers markets. The problem was, it wasn't even 10 o'clock yet.

...So I helped this 86-year-old lady into the church office. On the way, she said her husband had died and she lived alone. Her name was WANDA. I said to myself, "If I was 86 years old and lived alone, I would want someone to talk to, too."

I helped her to a seat in the office and she talked with Carol for a while. Then I took her out to the hallway where she watched the Kitchen Cupboard staff unload a food truck. Ione, Aiden, and Carol LaPlant talked to her and got her some food. The lady from Extension gave her coupons. As I helped her on the bus, she said, "Thank you for spending so much time with me. You're a good pastor."

Now I was way behind, so I went back to my office and Ed popped in. I've known Ed for probably 15 years. He and his wife live in Conger's Trailer Park. She works and he is on disability. They take in anyone who needs a place to stay, be they extended family, friends or a homeless person. I don't know where they put all the people or how they feed them all. Well, I guess I do. Ed comes to the Kitchen Cupboard, which helps.

Monday, Ed had two of his teenage step children with him and usually they would take the bus home, but the bus wasn't due for over two hours, so he said, "I know I'm a pain in the neck, but could you help me out?" And you know, at that moment, that's just how I felt. I felt like I was being imposed upon and he WAS being a pain in the neck.

Then I remembered three things. 1) We have two cars and he has none. 2) We NEVER run out of food. 3) One time, Ed was over in Ithaca and he met a homeless woman whose mother had died somewhere down south and she had no way to get home for the funeral. Ed went around to all the people he knew and collected enough money for bus fare and food. Since the bus didn't leave till the next day, he brought her home and the next day

took her to the bus station and sent her on her way home.

If I had no car and no food, I would want a RIDE home and some FOOD. So, I said, "Sure Ed, I'd be glad to run you home." ...And, as you can see, in SPITE of the inconveniences, the sermon got done. And that's the way it goes. If we DO love others as ourselves, God works things out.

Conclusion – "Twinkies and Root Beer" (Author unknown)

Let me close with a story. It's titled "Twinkies and Root Beer" and the author is unknown. (*General Word*)

A little boy wanted to meet God. He knew it was a long trip to where God lived, so he packed his suitcase with Twinkies and a six-pack of Root Beer and he started his journey. When he had gone about three blocks, he met an elderly man. The man was sitting in the park just feeding some pigeons. The boy sat down next to him and opened his suitcase.

He was about to take a drink from his root beer when he noticed that the man looked hungry, so he offered him a Twinkie. The man gratefully accepted it and smiled at boy. His smile was so pleasant that the boy wanted to see it again, so he offered him a root beer. Again, the man smiled at him. The boy was delighted!

They sat there all afternoon eating and smiling, but they never said a word. As it grew dark, the boy realized how tired he was and he got up to leave, but before he had gone more than a few steps, he turned around, ran back to the man, and gave him a hug. The man gave him his biggest smile ever.

When the boy opened the door to his own house a short time later, his mother was surprised by the look of joy on his face. She asked him, "What did you do today that made you so happy?" He replied, "I had lunch with God." But before his mother could respond, he added, "You know what? God's got the most beautiful smile I've ever seen!"

Meanwhile, the elderly man, also radiant with joy, returned to his home. His son was stunned by the look of peace on his face and he asked, "Dad, what did you do today that made you so happy?" He replied, "I ate Twinkies in the park with God." However, before his son responded, he added, "You know,

he's much younger than I expected."

You are as close to Jesus as most people will ever get. If you allow your life to be “messed up” with sweet spots and serendipitous acts of love and kindness, you will be amazed at the fascinating people you meet. And you will be amazed to realize that one of the people you get to know, is JESUS.

Amen.

Matthew 7:12: “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.”