

**Caring Community – a Core Value of BAPC**  
**Job 2:11-13 and Matthew 14:13-16**  
**7 March 2021**

You know the way that certain books – mainly non-fiction books – will sometimes include a segment at the beginning titled *Forward?* Well, I suppose you could consider **this** to be the *Forward* to this morning's sermon.

Those of us who drive slowly and mainly in the right lane are used to being passed by folks whose kids are in car seats. And we know that often those children are holding a cellphone or an iPad and, as my grand-daughter says, they are *watchin' a show*. It makes the trip so much easier for everyone! But when my sons were little and we were out for a ride, we put in a **cassette** and we listened to songs... or sometimes to children's stories read by stars like Judy Densch. A rendering of Maurice Sendak's Pierre – a Cautionary Tale comes to mind this morning. **You** can listen to it on YouTube, if you'd like... but here's the essence of it:

Pierre's a little boy. His mother comes into his bedroom one morning.  
Hello, Pierre – you are my pride and joy! I don't care.  
We have lovely things to do today. I don't care.  
I've made your favorite breakfast. I don't care.  
If you don't come soon, you'll miss the fun I've planned for our walk downtown.  
I don't care.  
So, she leaves. And Pierre's dad comes in. Same thing. He leaves.  
A lion shows up. (Maybe it's stuffed.)  
Hello, Pierre. I'm thinking of having you for breakfast. I don't care.  
So, the lion eats Pierre.  
Later, the parents return. There's no Pierre to be seen... but the lion's fairly fat. So, they take it quickly to a doctor who whacks it in a certain way...  
and out pops Pierre... a little worse for wear.  
Take me home, Pierre begs. And the lion replies:  
If you care to, I'll let **all** of you ride home on my back.  
Everyone then looks at Pierre.  
I care, he shouts.

And the **moral** of the story? CARE!

Kathleen Norris is **one** of those authors whose books **often** begin with a Forward. One book she's written bears the title Acedia and Me. *Acedia* – it's a Latin word with Greek antecedents – and as Norris explains in her Forward “At its root the word means absence of care.” Think of acedia as a condition one might have, like high blood pressure, Atrial Flutter, or depression... only instead of it being a physical or a mental

condition, *acedia* is a spiritual condition; it's lodged in the soul. Norris writes, "The person afflicted by *acedia* refuses to care or is incapable of doing so.

When life becomes too challenging and engagement with others too demanding, *acedia* offers a kind of spiritual morphine: you know the pain is **there**, yet you can't rouse yourself to give a damn." She goes on: "That it **hurts to** care is borne out in etymology... for the word *care* derives from an Indo-European word meaning to *cry out*... as in a lament. "Caring is not a **passive** thing, but rather an **assertion**... that no matter how strained and **messy** our relationships **can** be, it is **worth** something to be present **with others**, doing our small part." Along with that, "Care is also required for the daily routines (or disciplines) that *acedia* would have us suppress... or deny as meaningless... or as too much bother."

So, now... what is all of this a Forward to? Or why have I shared this with you today? Because during their recent Discernment Retreat, Bon Air's leaders identified five Values as being at the heart of Bon Air's identity... as being Core Values... deep in this congregation's DNA. Session said that **these** are **the** Values you need to cherish to be true to your calling and to yourself. And today I'm focusing a little time and attention on one of them – Caring Community. Bon Air Church values, and aims to be, a Caring Community.

To move us a little further into this reflection, I'm going to read two selections from the Bible. I admit that I read and preached on these same passages on my fourth Sunday with you, back in July. But I don't think we'll be worse off today for returning to this well. We'll see!

Please, if you care, join me in the Prayer for Illumination.

**Eternal God, your kingdom has broken into our troubled world through the life, death and resurrection of your Son. Help us to hear your Word and obey it, that we may become instruments of your saving love; through Jesus Christ our Lord, we pray. Amen.**

### **Job 2:11-13**

*Now when Job's three friends heard of all these troubles that had come upon him, each of them set out from his home – Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They met together to go and console and comfort him. When they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him, and they raised their voices and wept aloud; they tore their robes and threw dust in the air upon their heads. They sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.*

## Matthew 14:13-16

*Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat."*

As a result of the effort you and your leaders put into Discerning freshly Bon Air's Mission, Vision and Values recently, you now can say to yourselves and to others that Bon Air Church deeply values a Caring Community. Bon Air Presbyterian Church values and aims for being a Caring Community. That's **not** to say that Bon Air Church is at all times caring... that it never misses the mark. Not at all.

But it knows **there is** a mark that matters. And it knows that when it's **trying** to be caring, what it's trying **for** is to be true to itself. A caring community is what God intends for Bon Air to be, at its core.

So, why is Caring Community one of your **Core** Values? Maybe most simply it's because you understand yourselves to be a community of persons *Seeking and Serving Christ*... letting him, his values and his ways inform you, shape you, and show up in your life and ministry. And Caring is what Christ **was**... what he **is**.

Looking for some solitude and perhaps the balm of prayer, as Christ came ashore he **saw** the crowd and he had compassion for them... and he cured their sick.

He didn't ignore them, or refuse to see them or avoid them. His heart went out to them. He let it go out. He gave them himself... the core of himself. He cared for them. And his caring was curing.

Father Henri Nouwen noted that in **real** caring, we **enter** another's pain or need... or joy, if that's what's going on in someone's life. We offer our **selves**, most importantly, to be **present with** that person. We sit on the **ground** with someone, if that's where he or she is.

Christ provided help to hurting, hungry people. He met many kinds of need. But **most** profoundly, he gave **himself** to people. He extended relationship to people. And honestly, **that** is what's at the **heart** of **salvation** – relationship. God crosses over to people... breaks down the walls and gives God's self to people. That's **how** Christ brought healing and life to people. It is how he brings **us** healing and life.

You, who **are now seeking and serving Christ** together here at Bon Air Church, **take** what Christ says and does quite **seriously**... and personally. **That** day in Galilee, those who were seeking and serving with him thought it would be best **for the crowd** if Jesus would send them on so they could get some supper before night fell. *They need not go away*, Christ told them. *You give them something to eat*. And **with** his help, they did. From his hands to their hands to the hands of everyone who was there, the bread was passed. *Here friend*, they might have said to each one. *Here is something I've received from Christ to share with you!*

And no doubt, **this** day in your hands or your hearts, you have things that **you've** received from him, too: His care... for you. His companionship. His good counsel. His pardon and peace. Himself. You know that no one can give what he or she does not have. But surely Christ has filled your hands, your heart, **with his caring self**. And, like those **first** seekers and servers, you also have heard him saying: *Now, you give them something*. So... give them what?

The world, as you well know, is in some serious peril now, in all kinds of ways; and many in it have an urgent need for care now. Well, you **give** your care. I've seen that you do. You **see** persons suffering injustices. And you go and stand alongside of them and demand the justice they deserve. You **see** parents unable now to feed their families. And you fill the welcome center with groceries for Bainbridge to distribute. You do **not ignore** those in need, or **refuse** to **see** them; you resist the urge to **avoid** them. Your hearts go out to them. You **let** your hearts go out to them. **You** go out. You give **yourselves**. And, yes, it costs you. Sometimes it's messy. But it's a cost you pay. Because you care.

You care **because** you are cared **for** by Christ. And his care is curing. **It** cures what ails **you**... the deep-down stuff.

And **through** you now Christ's care and curative power is getting to **others**... just as Christ intends. Thanks be to God.

So, as I see it, there's little room for *acedia* here at Bon Air Church. Not much, it seems to me. The community is pretty strong... the Caring Community... **because** its members are well-nourished, aren't they... aren't you? Christ **himself** makes sure of **that**. He **himself** keeps coming close. *Take, eat, this is my body given for you today*. Coming close. Caring for you. Making sure that you **have** something to share with **others**... something, the **very** thing, they need... and something they are likely to value, too: Caring Community, indeed.