

- Bait and Switch.
  - We had agreed on everything and I had called the night before to make sure that all was ready. “Everything’s great, come in and sign the papers...”
  - So, I went to the dealership (not in this area) and was referred to the manager who came in and told me that the car I had ordered was at another dealership. But, for just \$800 more I could have an even better one that was right there already. I refused. He kept pushing and pushing and pushing...I refused.
  - Again and again and again and again, he tried to sell me the “better” one.
  - Finally, I said, loud enough for the whole showroom to hear, “I am leaving. I won’t fall prey to the ol’ Bait and Switch.”
  
- *Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all I have commanded you. behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”*
  - As I mentioned last week and the week before, these are the marching orders of Jesus and the foundation of our message series, Back to Basics, what is truly important in our faith.
  - So, last week we started with the most basic.
  - Hopefully you got the message that God’s love is at the heart of this call. God is a loving father who cherishes us, who seeks to hold us close and to give us what is best.
  - And then we looked at prayer, which Jesus said would help.
    - Again, very simply, prayer is a conversation with God.
    - And it doesn’t matter how or when we pray, only that we DO, and that we take time out for God EVERY DAY.

- OK, that's God and how we connect. Now we move on to the second part of the series: our love for others.
- To do that we must first set the record straight.
  - The Pharisee of the Gospel was not a bad guy. In fact, he had a lot going for him: honest, faithful, didn't cheat, fasted twice a week, gave 10% to God, prayed four times each day.
  - Also for the record, the tax collector was no saint. The Romans assessed each person a certain amount and it was the job of the tax collector (chosen from among the native people), to collect that tax. The tax collector collected as much as he could, often using the brute force of Roman soldiers. He sent to Rome the assessed amount and kept the difference, betraying his own people for a few bucks
- This, then is the classic bait and switch. Jesus holds up, not the Pharisee but the tax collector.
  - Jesus wants to shake his listeners up and this parable should be no less jarring for us.
  - If we're honest, we recognize the Pharisee as a proud prig, swept up with his own importance, trumpeting his own accomplishments.
  - The tax collector may not be a good man, but at least comes to God, aware of his sinfulness, aware of his need for God's mercy, and fully aware that he doesn't deserve it.
  - Jesus holds up one and not the other because of the way each presents himself to God. The Pharisee is focused on himself while the tax collector is focused on God.
  - Jesus tells us, 'the one who humbles himself will be exalted.'

- ...*humbles himself*...Humility comes from the Latin word ‘humus,’ meaning ‘earth’ or ‘soil.’
  - The humble stand before God with feet planted firmly on the ground, firm in the reality of who they are, aware of what they have done (or not), and sorry for what’s wrong.
  - They see what’s truly there, rather than an image skewed positive that overlooks the faults or skewed negative that overlooks the gifts.
  - The humble person recognizes what God sees when looking at each of us.
  - Humility, then, is the glue that keeps me connected to God, aware that God made us, that we are created in God’s image, gifted with unique graces and talents. But God also sees our sinfulness, our refusal of His love for ourselves or for others.
  - God loves each of us because of the former and in spite of the latter.
  
- Last week, in talking about God’s love, I referenced the Our Father and spoke about the intimate word Jesus offered: *Abba*.
  - That single word sums up God’s love for us: Poppa. Daddy.
  - God’s love is given fully and freely, without hesitation or qualification, a love that demands nothing of us in return.
  - We cannot buy or earn or merit God’s love. God rains it down on each of us, whether we are good or bad, whether we accept that love or not.

- If we let the conversation end there, it's only half of the story.
  - Like the Pharisee we remain focused on us. The rest of our discipleship then can seem “bait and switch” as well.
  - Sure God gives us His love but we know the catch: all the things we have to do: Go to Mass, be good, care for one another, even your enemies, look out for the poor and the weak and those with no voice.
  - But God's love is not bait and switch. We do not earn God's love by loving one another or going to Mass or being good, looking out for the poor.
  - God's love is an invitation. God's love is an invitation to share in His delight: the delight God takes in us and wants us to take in one another.
  - God created us to be beautiful, talented, joyful, peaceful, created us to be a visible reflection of His image for others.
  - We should rejoice, revel that we can share in God's very life by imitating God's love, not because we HAVE TO but because we are loved and we want to please our Lover.
  - **That's** why Christ told us, “love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12).

- Go back, then, to the Our Father. Yes, it speaks of God’s love for us but there are other words in that prayer that can’t be overlooked.
  - The first is the very first word: “OUR.” With that word alone Jesus reminds us that the love God has for us is given to others as well.
    - It is not just **MY** Father; it is OUR Father. God’s love immediately calls us into communion with Him **and with one another**. This communion is the very life of the Trinity and the Body of Christ.
    - I am not better than my brother or sister because we are all created and loved by the same Father.
  - Further in the prayer is a phrase all too often overlooked but one that should actually remind us what our relationship with one another is supposed to be.
    - *“Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.”*
    - Yes, God’s love is communal and an essential part of our receiving that love is how we in turn **offer it to others**.
- In our **humility**, we recognize the **reality** that the gifts God has given us in love are to be used for others.
  - Again, not because **we have to** but because God’s love for us and for the other makes possible and **allows us** to see the other as God does, using God’s eyes and ears and mind and heart rather than my own.
  - This is not mere tolerance or non-violent cohabitation, i.e., live and let live.

- God’s love creates in us an earnest desire to understand and to value the other, to look beyond the superficial and see the gifts God has given to this person, even and especially if I find him or her distasteful.
- God’s love helps me to see the other not as a question to be answered, a problem to be solved or a challenge to be dealt with but a sister or brother who I can accompany on the journey of life and, just as importantly, who can accompany me as well.
- Humility, then, is ALSO the glue that keeps me connected to others, aware of the gifts I have to share with the other and the gifts of others that I can learn from and draw from, for my good and for that of the other.
  - Here’s another reason why Alpha is so important. Alpha brings us together around a table, a shared meal. There’s a reason why Jesus did so much of his ministry at meals. There’s something about coming together and sharing over a meal, even and especially as we learn about Jesus Christ.
  - This is also why I hate the phrase “God never gives you more than you can handle.” Too often this gets misunderstood, as if I have to bare every one of my hardships or challenges on my own because somehow God thinks I can handle it.
  - That phrase can only be true and is best understood when I think of myself not in isolation but in relation to others who can help me share my load. The reverse is also true: my gifts may be what another needs, the vehicle God is using to make sure another’s burden is not too heavy.

- This is humility and the very reason God’s love calls us beyond ourselves. Sometimes it is for me as well as for the other.
  
- Whether for them or for us, giving love away freely is the start to making disciples
  - Anytime we give of our love, whether it be by helping our parents, calling someone who is lonely, spending time with a friend, making prayer shawls, bringing communion to the sick, we are showing God’s love to us.
  - Even in these small ways, we can help others to know that God loves them. It is so needed in our world today.
  - That’s why we’re hashtagging #gomakedisciples. We want people to know that God loves us and that that love sends us out.
  - The love of God and the call of Jesus is exercised not only here in Church. In fact, I would dare say it is not exercised even mainly here in Church.
  - Making Disciples is precisely about those small ways of love because love does not exist in a vacuum and cannot be lived in theory.
  - So I want you to begin Tweeting and Instagraming and Facebooking and whatever other “-ing” you can think of to let people see that you KNOW God’s love for you and you are not afraid to share it with others, that because God loves you, you are excited to share that love with others.

- It is not easy, though to reach out like that. In fact, it is pretty scary loving those who are difficult or different, those who challenge us or are angry.
  - Our refusal to love others limits how we receive God's love, even and especially our love for those who think or act differently, vote differently, those who ARE DIFFERENT, or still greater those who turn down our love or challenge us.
  - If we're like the Pharisee, convinced of our own righteousness, all too concerned with our own efforts, what we have done well, where we have succeeded, then we don't allow God to pull us outside of ourselves and our comfort zone. We don't share the gifts we've been given.
  - I can't tell you I'm there yet or that I do this easily. In fact, some of the biggest battles I have are when God calls me to look beyond the opposition I have received from one who doesn't like me or doesn't agree with me or challenges me. God's love calls me to see things differently to be more patient, to enter more deeply, to be less shallow, to be more gentle, to stop judging according to my own standards and use God's. Unfortunately, I often lose the battle on all fronts.

- And that's why Jesus reminds us that in God's love is also mercy and forgiveness "The humble will be exalted."
  - So when I fail to live up to the image of God or use properly the gifts God has given me, when I fail to love as God has loved me, or forgive others as I have begged that my trespasses be forgiven, I can come, in humility, to ask for mercy.
  - In humility I can pray for mercy when my faith is too weak and my own will too strong, when my trust is only in myself and I have failed to love as I should.
  - The tax collector prayed, "O God, be merciful to me a sinner," and he went home justified.
    - In Roman law, to be justified meant to be returned to innocence, as if the crime had never been committed.
    - The record of the crime was erased from the hard disk, the file shredded.
    - When we center ourselves on God, when we pray with humility, when we ask for forgiveness, when we seek to share what God has given us **WITH OTHERS**, not from some proverbial high horse but in **GENUINE LOVE**, God forgets our sin and sends us home justified.
- Then let us pray as the tax collector did pointedly aware that God hears our prayer: *The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds; it does not rest till it reaches its goal.*
- Now, let's go make disciples.