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 John 13:31-35
 Hudson 5-6-07

INTRODUCTION:

There's a great ZITS cartoon depicting teenage boyfriend and girlfriend, Jeremy and Sara. Sara's looking flustered and says to Jeremy: *Why is it that girls are so acutely aware of their surroundings, while boys are so clueless?*

And Jeremy responds with a thoughtful: "HUH?"

Sara says, *I'll prove it. Quick, close your eyes.* And she puts her hand across Jeremy's eyes. Now, she says, *tell me what I'm wearing.*

To which Jeremy gives another thoughtful: "UH . . ."
I'll make it easier, says Sara. *Tell me what you're wearing.*

Again, the response: "UM . . ."

Totally exasperated, Sara says,

Okay . . . then at least tell me who you're talking to!

And Jeremy says, "With my eyes closed?"

It's not just teenage boys. We all miss so much of what's going on right before us. And even more, we so often don't even notice each other. This morning the lectionary gospel lesson has Jesus sharing the "New Commandment," which specifically says that we should love each other. We hear a lot about love in church. What's that mean?

This morning I hope we can simply consider what it means to be present and actually notice and appreciate each other. That's the beginning of how we love each other.

SCRIPTURE: *Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so I say to you, "Where I am going you cannot come." I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

SERMON:

Last summer I brought a loaf of bread a lot like this to worship.

I brought this one because today's family communion Sunday.

I brought it because (even though it looks different than the bread Jesus broke) for us, it's a good reminder of the hardness of the Bread of Life. And I brought this loaf because it's unique and special. I got it at Great Lakes Baking Company. It's a Rustic Country French. It's an Artisan Bread. Artisan Bread is the latest fad in food.

White Wonder bread is out . . . specialty loaves are in.

Artisan bread is good because:

- It's heartier
- It's healthier
- It's tastier.

But the best part of artisan bread to me, is that it's hand crafted. That's what defines it as "artisan." And like a beautifully hand crafted piece of furniture, that's what makes it so good. The personal touch and care. Artisan bread is like the stuff mothers and grandmothers used to lovingly spend hours creating. The weird thing is, not all artisan bread is so pure. According to my friend in the bread industry, in our effort to be more efficient and profitable, we've found ways to cut corners and costs. And now, a lot of the Artisan Breads found on grocery store shelves come off the same old assembly lines as mass produced Wonder Bread. The difference that qualifies it to be called "artisan?" A factory worker touches each loaf as it goes by on a conveyer belt. And they can call it "handmade."

It makes me wonder how much of our lives these days are spent going through the motions instead of really *doing* what we've set out to do.

- Listening to each other by nodding our heads, while hearing nothing at all.
- Spending time with loved ones and friends, while our heads are somewhere altogether different.
- Like kids driving through the mountains and missing it all because they're so engrossed in their Game Boys.

Love . . . love is about so much more than going through the motions. It's about more than touching the loaf to make it hand made. It's about a full and true presence with each other. We live in a time and culture that praises and prides itself in busyness, as if the more hectic our lives the better we are . . . when in truth, that busyness is often more an example of a lack of presence . . . and in the end a lack of love. Among the many other things that love is about, it's centered in having a true presence. Not just physically being there . . . but being present with a tenacious patience and focus that emphatically says the one you're with is really loved.

It may be trite . . . but like much which is cliché, it also happens to be true. So many people nearing the end of their days when asked if they have any regrets say:

"I wish I had slowed down and appreciated each moment.
Taken more seriously each person I met.
Relished the gift of each day."

Jesus gave the disciples that new commandment: love each other like I have loved you. And how did Jesus love people? He willingly stopped dead in his tracks and cast aside every distraction to be with each person. He saw them in their full being. And they knew he was with them and for them.

When I first came to northeast Ohio I had never been in Amish country before. I didn't know much about them. And I thought the Amish to be a rather severe, legalistic, moralistic people with seemingly arbitrary hypocritical rules. In my head, I thought their attachment to the horse and buggy was because they saw the automobile as inherently evil. So you can probably understand why it didn't make sense to me that they would take a taxicab to Wal-Mart.

I didn't know what I'm sure most of you *do* know. The Amish don't see modern conveniences as evil in and of themselves. No . . . they see them as dangerous to their way of life which places family and community first. They know that being able to travel with such ease puts community in peril. It lets us move too fast. And they're right.

A friend who works almost exclusively with the Amish told me "they just stop by." He says they call it: "going visiting." He said, you look up and there they are at your door. He said, the Amish are always prepared to stop whatever they're doing to just be with whoever stops by. They don't phone ahead, not so much because they don't have phones (which they intentionally don't), as they don't have phones so that they do *have* to just "stop by." It's not about appointments, something we've lost in our over-planned days. It's about being together. And that's where love starts.

Last month, a friend from back in Connecticut learned a lesson like that, that really changed her. Danielle was on a medical work camp trip in the Dominican Republic. When she first got to the decrepit, run-down village where they would be working, she saw a million things she wanted to fix. But the leader of the group encouraged her to slow down and take in the experience first. And she was reminded that the people in the Dominican Republic care more about relationships than anything else. She was asked to put away her watch because the people there were more "flexible" and things often happened late. Timing's just not a priority. Danielle thought to herself that, that was one of the biggest problems. If they were just a little more goal oriented and focused like us, so much more could be accomplished.

All that changed as she spent time with the people of the village. Danielle said she met one fourteen year old boy who she walked around the village with one afternoon. He didn't know English and she didn't know much Spanish. But they still talked. They talked about his brothers and sisters. About his village, his school, the beach . . . which he'd never seen. After a few hours, he said something she didn't understand. He said it over and over until they found someone to translate. What he said was: *Even after you leave, I will never forget you.* And Danielle thought to herself, "I've never said that to anyone . . . especially after only a few hours." And then she said it all started to make sense. It was amazing, they just wanted to be with us. Whatever they'd planned, they willingly put aside to spend time with us. And she said: *it made me try to remember one day, one afternoon even, that I put everything aside to just be with someone. No TV, no phone, no list, no appointments, no errands, nothing – just walking, talking and enjoying someone. My life is so busy, so scheduled. Running here, stopping there. I barely have time to say hello in the grocery store.*

Danielle said she started the week by thinking she needed to show them how they need to be more like us . . . but in the end she knew that she needed to become more like them. (Danielle Gallop)

And Jesus gave them that new commandment:

- that they love each other
- that they spend time together
- that they are present with each other

Isn't that at least in part what family communion is all about?
We gather, all of us, young and old.
And we're reminded that we are supposed to be community for each other.

That we are supposed to be loving community in Christ.