

New hope sermon Being God's Thermostat – Eph.2:14-18, Gal. 3:26-29, Micah 6:6-8

Introduction:

We have all experienced, in each of our countries and contexts, the pain of injustice, oppression and discrimination. This is a live topic on our college campuses, in our fractured world and in our relationships. I know it grieves God's heart as it has grieved so many of us. I have sat with many of you who are struggling with this issue. So, what do we do about it? Today I want to challenge us to become thermostats to change these dynamics and bring God's justice, mercy and hope to our hurting world. We start with two stories about thermostats.

The importance of thermostats

In his book, [Chase the Lion](#) Pastor Mark Batterson tells this story:

Shortly after being installed as the twentieth pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered a sermon in November of 1954 titled "Transformed Nonconformist." "The Christian is called upon not to be like a thermometer conforming to the temperature of his society," said King, "but he must be like a thermostat serving to transform the temperature of his society..."

"I have seen many white people who sincerely oppose segregation and [discrimination]," said King. "But they never took a [real] stand against it because of fear of standing alone." Are you willing not just to stand but to stand alone?

On December 1, 1955, a transformed nonconformist boarded the Cleveland Avenue bus just five blocks from the pulpit where King delivered that sermon. When the white section filled up with passengers, the bus driver ordered Rosa Parks to give up her seat in the colored section. Rosa politely refused. She took a moral stand by remaining seated.

"Our mistreatment was not right," Rosa said. "I was just tired of it." It wasn't a physical tiredness; it was a moral tiredness. "The only tired I was, was tired of giving in." Rosa Park's stand against racial segregation started a ripple effect. It led to a court battle, which led to a citywide boycott, which led to the Supreme Court ruling segregation unconstitutional."

Mark Batterson adds, "Until the pain of staying the same becomes more acute than the pain of change, nothing happens. We simply maintain the status quo. And we convince ourselves that playing it safe is safe. But the greatest risk is taking no risks at all. (Mark Batterson, *Chase the Lion (Multnomah, 2016)*, pages 121-122)

Rosa became a thermostat to combat the racism that oppressed her people.

Let me reinforce the importance of thermostats with another story from a different perspective: this one from a white missionary pilot who has served Wycliffe missionaries all over the world. Bernie May's book *Climbing on Course* has this story:

Recently Dave Wike, Eastern Airline pilot, and I were flying a JAARS (Jungle Air and Aviation Radio Service) Helio down V-93 en route from Hampton New Hampshire to Philadelphia. The weather was marginal. Freezing level as 8,000 feet, right where we had been cleared to fly. As Dave flew I kept my eye on the outside air temperature gauge. It was nothing more than an old fashioned thermometer. A change of one or two degrees would make the difference between wing and prop covered with ice or smooth sailing.

As the ice began to build up I reached for the mike and requested a change of altitude from New York Center. Another 5 minutes at 8000 feet would have been disastrous. "What we need," I shouted to Dave, as dropped down to warmer air at 6000 feet," is a thermostat out there, not just a thermometer."

Thermometers measure the environment. Thermostats change it. Our house has a thermostat. It measures, reacts and brings change. It makes our house comfortable. There seems to be a lot of thermometers in the kingdom these days. It is easy to get a reading on everything from the Charismatics to the Catholics. Everyone seems to have an opinion. Sometimes I think the church is in danger of paralysis by analysis.

Rare are the thermostat people. Those who are not content with simply measuring but are in the business of bringing change. Those who can cool down an explosive situation or build a fire under a cold church."

Bernie added: "Recently a nearby church renovated its building. When they put up the new steeple, they left off the cross and installed a weather vane. Weathervane, like thermometers only measures the environment.

Crosses change things. There is nothing wrong with measure and evaluating. Every thermostat has a built-in thermometer. But the need in the kingdom today is for people who will do more than analyze. The cry is for people who will take an uncomfortable situation and change it to meet needs and glorify God.” (Bernie Mays, *Climbing on Course* Multnomah Press, 1979, pp. 63-64)

Are you a thermometer or a thermostat? A thermometer measures temperature – it indicates what its environment is like. A thermostat regulates temperature – it is used to change the environment to conform to a certain desired setting. Why is it easier to stay a thermometer and not become a thermostat?. Because thermostats change the status quo. They see the need, react and do what is necessary to make it right, from God’s perspective.

God’s “desired setting” for human relationships is clear in Gal. 3:18 and Eph. 2:16-17 Gal. 3:18 *There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you all are one in Christ Jesus.*” *Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross and our hostility toward each other was put to death. He brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from Him and peace to the Jews who were near.*”

The problem of discrimination and stereotyping today

But this isn’t how the world operates. There is great distortion because of racial discrimination and gender imbalance. The attitudes of discrimination, of superiority, of inequality and privilege, the power of money to control choices make in favor of the powerful (i.e., those with money and status) in schools and churches and nations all are creating havoc in society and in personal and national relationships.

I have faced these issues first hand, both as a woman and then specifically as a Caucasian woman. I first became involved in the Asian Indian community in Chicago at the invitation of a local Indian leader. In my first year in the community, two tragic incidents occurred. Two different Indian college students, who had been raised in the United States and were studying in universities in the States, each committed suicide on their college campus. In both cases, they had fallen in love with a student on their campus whom their parents rejected as an acceptable marriage partner. The Indian students were victims of generational tensions in their immigrant families.

In an effort to become a bridge person between traditional Indian parents and the children they were raising in the United States, I became committed to the Indian community. An Asian colleague and I worked with Asian Indian teenagers and heard their stories. We had a drama troupe at the Indian church that even had a few billings in other parts of the country. During those years, I wore saris whenever I was with the Indians. My Asian colleague and I held "Growing Up in America" seminars to discuss the tensions between generations. I went to India at the invitation of several Indian leaders to learn more about their culture from them. I was invited by a mission organization to do research in England on the needs of the Asian Indians in the suburbs of London. I went for more education, doing a Master of Theology in Hindu, Buddhist, Christian dialogue and a Ph.D. on Asian immigrant identity issues in America. All the while I was welcomed in the community and established many dear relationships.

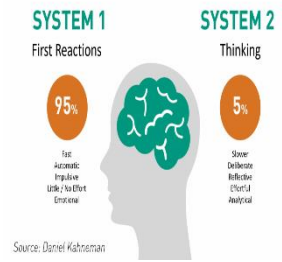
But in the end, my hopes of working as a bridge person between the Asian Indian generations were not realized for two reasons: First, I was not an Asian Indian by blood so I was not considered part of the extended family, and conflicts are usually resolved by other family members. That is an important cultural shame issue I had not understood. Secondly, Indians assumed because I was Caucasian, I did not understand their issues and could not be of help. I had been stereotyped because of my race.

Stereotypes so often cause a denial of the respect, honor and privilege due to people of color or gender who are not of the dominant group. They are part of our unconscious thinking about other people. We look at people and

automatically, often unconsciously put them in various categories. There is both conscious and unconscious bias – and it is unfair, it makes people unequal, it takes away the other’s rights and dignity, it is prejudiced and it is deeply flawed.

Vertical Violence

The results become worse than just stereotyping. They pave the way for Vertical Violence. Here’s a definition: Vertical Violence is any behavior conducted by a superior or supervisor that could reasonably be considered humiliating, intimidating, threatening or demeaning to an individual or group of individuals. It can permeate the entire organization and has a detrimental effect on the organization. It originated from the concept of inappropriate use of coercive power. A dominant presence is hovering over another entity that is not the same shape or size and dictating their life.



Recognizing this problem in marriage and male/female relationships, I featured its role in the monthly magazine called Bridges that I edited for 7 years. Here is the front cover for domestic issues.



It’s been said “The judgmental heart owns a hundred microscopes and no mirrors. How telling!!! As African American poet Maya Angelou said, “I’ve learned that people will forget who you are. Will forget what you do but people will never forget how you make them feel.”

Vertical violence or relational power plays for control strip a person of their dignity, their honor, their respect and their inclusion in groups where they are judged to be inferior.

God’s Solution

God’s solution is found at the foot of the cross where people of every race or creed can set aside differences that separate and divide and be united in the bonds of peace – the peace Jesus Christ alone can bring. Once we have been made new creations by our faith in Christ and members of Christ’s family the Holy Spirit then works in us to help us live out God’s love and mercy and justice and care for other people – whether we agree with them or not. As Paul tells the Ephesians in Eph.4:30-32 *The Message: Don’t grieve God. Don’t break his heart. His Holy Spirit, moving and breathing in you, is the most intimate part of your life, making you fit for himself. Don’t take such a gift for granted.³¹⁻³² Make a clean break with all cutting, backbiting, profane talk. Be gentle with one another, sensitive. Forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you.*

No more violent self-assertiveness, no more slander (where you tear down someone else to build up your case or cause), no more resentment or revenge or harsh words. All these attitudes are behind so much of the suffering in world news each day – as well as in our families and in our churches and in our personal relationships. INSTEAD, living as our new created self means being kind to each other, going out of our way to listen and care and support and help each other, forgiving each other, believing the best rather than the worst in communication – and when there is misunderstanding or grievance we say “Help me understand what you meant or intended in that remark.”

Micah the O.T. prophet challenged the Israelites with the same message. *What does the Lord require of you but to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with thy God.* Micah 6:8 Acting justly – taking on another’s cause for God’s good in a situation. Speaking on their behalf when they have been or felt silenced. Loving mercy and thus caring for those who are marginalized or side-lined. And walking humbly with God. When you do that ,you will also be able to walk humbly with your neighbor.

A Peacemaking Model

Practically, what this means often involves being a peacemaker. In our work for justice as a Christian, this may well become your calling, so let me tell a story from the book *The Path of a Peacemaker* by Brian Noble that illustrates how the process can work.

He says, [In the peacemaking process] “the most important thing we need to understand is humility ...Part of humility is taking responsibility for my sin and asking forgiveness even when it doesn’t feel good... A particular school had just experienced two teen suicides...The school’s environment was riddled with inconsistency and bullying, and the students started blaming one another for the suicides...[The superintendent called in Noble and his peacemaking partner to deal with the problem.] We began interviewing staff to see what their perspectives were regarding the problem. As the interviews continued, a pattern emerged: there was a clear inconsistency of rules among the teachers...After we had gathered and analyzed the information, I met with the faculty to offer our assessment and recommendations. ‘Students need consistency of rules from class to class,’ I said. A female teacher raised her hand to ask a question...I answered. Apparently, it wasn’t a satisfactory answer because she stormed out of the room, slamming the door as she left...Somehow I finished my presentation and answered a few questions and then I enlisted the help of another teach to find the one who had just left. When we walked into her room, I was aghast...She was slamming cupboards. She was throwing books. She turned and eyed me with a look that could kill. ‘I hate men always telling me what to do!’ she shouted.

She was fairly short (5’3’)...I am almost 6’ so I got down on my knees by a desk. She responded with a look of suspicion, as if to say, ‘What are you doing?’ ‘So,’ I said, ‘can you tell me more?’ She hesitated, again wary of whatever approach I was taking. ‘Everywhere I do, men are telling me what to do. Now YOU. Your answer to my question was lame. You can’t tell me how to run MY class.’ The off-loading continued for a few minutes. I remained on my knees and let her spew, careful not to interrupt. ‘I’m listening,’ I said. ‘Is there more?’ Yes. I turned out...

All was quiet for a moment. Then I said four words that were clearly the work of the Holy Spirit. ‘Will you forgive me?’ Her face froze in puzzlement, as if nobody had ever said those words to her before. ‘I hurt you,’ I continued, ‘and I need your forgiveness.’ She took a step closer like a wounded animal, afraid that I might do what others – probably men – had likely done to her: hurt her.

‘I...forgive...you,’ she said. ‘I’m embarrassed about how I threw a fit.’ She started crying and came closer...‘I have never had a man ask me to forgive him’...Because I listened to the Holy Spirit’s directive to humble myself and ask forgiveness, the teacher was able to drop her pride and listen to my objective assessment of the school. In the end, she not only heeded many of my recommendations but also became an advocate for positive change in the school...

Noble continues, ”Humility is not only about words but also about gestures,...not only about what the other person hears but also about what the other person sees... Humility [also] involves giving up our rights – even if we are “right”...Humility is triggered by the reminder that everyone has a story...so instead of trying to win the battle, I focused on appreciating, respecting and empathizing with her story...and showing her respect (Brian Noble, *The Path of a Peacemaker*, Baker Books, 2019, pp. 177,179-182).

Noble’s peacemaking approach as a thermostat, not just reacting to the environment as a thermometer, but seeking to defuse the conflict, led to healing for that teacher and ultimately to restoring the peace and equilibrium to that hurting high school. He demonstrated how to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God. My prayer for all of us is that we can do the same – hence our song of response: Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.

“Let there Be Peace on Earth and let it begin with me
Let there Be Peace on Earth, the peace that was meant to be
With God as our Father, family all are we,
Let us walk with each other in perfect harmony
Let peace begin with me, let this be the moment now
With every step I take, let this be my solemn vow:
To take each moment and live each moment in peace eternally!
Let there Be Peace on Earth, and let it begin with me.”
Amen!
Dr. M.L. Codman-Wilson 10/3/19
Here is the picture taken Sunday of our members who are living out this story.

