

Stand By Me

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Date: 23 November 2014

Preacher: Rev. James Wagner

[0 : 00] Thanks, Sheila. I'm sorry I don't remember exactly who you wanted to share on this roster today, but at any rate, I am here today to talk to you about pastoral care and a specific form of that, which we have at St. John's, which is called Stephen Ministry, and that was introduced about 20 years ago, which Sheila didn't identify that in introducing me specifically.

But it existed here for a period of time, and then it discontinued, and then I reintroduced that. Interestingly, the thing about that, and I'm going to drop that subject for a little while and just come back to more generally speaking pastoral care, but when I went from Regent College out to the Valley, I moved here in 92 from Michigan and landed here in Vancouver, started up at Regent, was there from 92 to 96 in 97.

When I went out to the Valley, they were trying to identify what they could do about pastoral care there as well, because it seemed like there were people who, as they described, fallen through the cracks.

You hear about this all the time, don't you, in communities? You hear about that, not only in Christian communities, but other faith communities. You hear about that also in our general community.

You even hear that from Vancouver Coastal Health and the other health regions about people who just fall through the cracks, as if they're kind of literal kind of cracks out there. But I guess there's no other way to describe that people aren't getting the kind of attention that we think that people should.

[1 : 35] Anyway, I first heard about Steve's ministry when I was out in the Valley. They had thought about that and didn't introduce it then. That was back in 97. And I bypassed that at the time and designed something else for St. Matthew's where I was.

And then I left Abbotsford in 2009 and kind of landed here at St. John's. And I remember turning up at the evening service.

And that was the Sunday that David Short's leave of absence was announced. It was met in the aisle in the evening by Leslie Bentley. And she said, I guess we can actually turn to you for some help now.

And in terms of hitting the ground running, that's what I was in a part being asked to do. And I actually wasn't ready to do that. But I needed some time as well. I'd planned a church and been doing that for nine years.

And that was pretty hard going. And so I needed a bit of a break as well. And I was able to take about three months break before Dan then called me and asked if I would help out with the 730 service and some other pastoral things like weddings and funerals.

[2 : 48] And then I started kind of partnering up with Edie. And she was involved in the first introduction of Stephen's ministry as well. So, and then, you know, Edie took leave over that summer of 2010.

And then when she came back, she announced her retirement. And so I kind of partnered with her until she retired in June of 2011, I believe it was. So anyway, it wasn't long after that that we reintroduced Stephen's ministry to St. John's.

But I really want to talk about some other things with respect to pastoral care before we get into that specific expression of it. And there is a number of expressions of pastoral care that go on at St. John's, aren't there?

But the title that Sheila came up with is Stand By Me, which is an interesting title. I don't know what comes to mind when you hear the word stand by me.

But I want to kind of unpack this a little bit because I think it's helpful in thinking about pastoral care. And there are two things that may come to your mind immediately when you hear those three words stand by me.

[3 : 51] And one is that it's actually the title of a song called Stand By Me. And lots of you are shaking your heads. And so we'll see how many of you actually know who wrote that song.

Is that an uncomfortable laugh? Or is it someone by the name of Ben E. King? Not to be confused with B.B. King.

And I think B.B. King was probably a better musician than Ben E. King was. But you may not be able to name any of B.B. King's songs. But this one, Ben E. King, he wrote Stand By Me.

And I won't ask you to sing it. I will share the first lines with you, though. I won't sing it either. That's not happening this morning. I do like to sing, but not songs like this. Not at least with people like you.

I like to sing other songs with people like you in places like this. And this one doesn't work for this occasion in some respects. But listen to this.

[4 : 50] It says, When the night has come and the land is dark, and the moon is the only light we'll see, No, I will not be afraid. Oh, I won't be afraid.

Just as long as you stand. Stand by me. And after that, it kind of gets a little bit soft. But that's not actually a bad way to start when you actually think about some of the circumstances that we face.

Right? The following lines is then, So, darling, darling, stand by me. Oh, stand by me. Oh, stand, stand by me. Stand by me. We can drop the oh, darling part. But you do want to have someone standing by you when you're going through what is described here, right?

Not just the night, literally, but the land seems to be dark. And in the moon, here it says the only light we'll see. Well, as Christians, we have a different light, don't we? Jesus is the light of the world. And that's the greatest light that we have with us as we're walking through those times which actually are afraid. You know, we can be afraid and be described as darkness.

[5 : 51] And there's a whole range of circumstances that we experience, that we face, that can be described as darkness. Some of those are explainable, aren't they? I think in terms of darkness.

But some of them are not. Sometimes we go through darkness and we just don't know why. It's not actually incidental. Incidental. You know what I mean by that? Occasional. You know, something actually hasn't happened in our life.

And all of a sudden, there's just darkness. Yeah, darkness can be explained by things like grief or other kinds of loss, transitions. Not only death, but maybe a loss of a job.

Or maybe divorce. Or some other kind of circumstance of that. There's an explainable darkness that overcomes our life. But there are other times when darknesses actually aren't explainable by those kinds of incidents that I've made.

So there's this title, Stand By Me and Ben E. King. But also, that was the theme song for a movie with that title as well.

[6 : 49] Now, you probably heard the song, Stand By Me. I don't know if you saw the movie, Stand By Me. But it was a movie that was produced and directed by Rob Reiner, that name you may know, back in 1986.

And it was based actually on a book written by Stephen King. And the title of that book, some of you are shaking your head, so it seems like some of you know about this. The title of that book was, does anyone know?

Interesting. And the book was called The Body. And I don't recommend the book, though I haven't read it, so maybe that's not fair. But I mean, really, I mean, there are only so many books to read, and so you need to be careful the ones that you recommend.

Certainly don't recommend the ones that you haven't read, but I don't know if it's fair to withhold a recommendation of one you haven't read either. But if you want to read a book on the body, you could read Charles Coulson's book on the body.

That would probably be much more edifying, I would gather. But anyway, the storyline of this movie and this book was that there was a body.

[7 : 54] Someone was actually killed. And there were these four adolescent boys. And they decided to go on a journey to find this body. They were, you know, kind of here, there, and everywhere, these four boys.

They were kind of loosely associated with one another. They weren't kind of really, they didn't really kind of fit in their school system very well. One was bullied, and one was kind of bookish.

And I don't know how you describe the other two. But at any rate, they decided that they would go on a journey together with one another to try to find this body. And it's interesting how these kind of storylines pop up and they just kind of get repeated, don't they?

And when we think of our own tradition and that of Jesus' death and his life, his resurrection, his ascension, and the body that was raised and looking for Jesus and lo and behold, they weren't really looking for him, but he came to them, didn't they?

Well, in this case, these boys are looking for this body. They actually find it, but there's some older boys that are looking for it as well. And they kind of steal the day. But it's about their journey together. It's about them standing by one another in the circumstances of their life and as they go on this search, this kind of quest, as it were.

[9 : 07] And certainly that kind of theme runs all the way through our literature, all the way back to the Odyssey and Odysseus and his winter return home to Penelope and the quest that we have as Christians as well as kind of walking with one another, kind of walking in the spirit as it were as well, keeping in step with the spirit as it is.

So anyway, this term, stand by me, this phrase, I love this for a number of reasons. Let me first kind of say what this doesn't say and then what it does say.

And I like this idea of standing initially. Now, to be sure, it's important that we do walk with one another, as I mentioned.

But when you think about stand by, it doesn't mean walk by. And in the world in which we live in, don't we, we walk by a lot of people. We walk by a lot of strangers, don't we?

And sometimes when we walk by a stranger, it's great to look into their face. Maybe if you have the occasion to look into their eyes and you see something that maybe resonates or some satisfaction or joy.

[10 : 21] But obviously we walk by people and sometimes we don't get a look in their face or even if we do, there isn't a kind of a resonance. You just see maybe even a kind of a sadness in people's face or even something more than that.

But nevertheless, we just end up kind of walking walking by, right? And that just has great kind of feelings of isolation and loneliness to it, doesn't it, when you hear that kind of walking by compared to standing by.

There's also this kind of phrase of sitting by, right? And which isn't standing by someone. And so the sitting is just a bit more passive.

And sometimes when we're sitting by someone on a bus or the theater or some other place, there's no kind of compulsion necessarily to talk to that person. It's just kind of assume you're waiting on something else and why kind of strike up a conversation with this person.

So you just kind of sit by and watch life pass by, as it were. It's somewhat kind of a static position in life. And I think that's helpful when you think about then the word stand, which I really like when you think about standing by someone.

[11 : 29] There is something of a connection there. It's not passive or static. There's something almost passionate or dynamic about when you're standing by someone, as it were.

And I think it implies or maybe it assumes that you're together with that person as you stand, stand by them. Well, let me just look at the other word by, though.

Not when we're talking about standing, not just walking, not just sitting, but standing. This doesn't actually mean standing against someone. If you thought about it in those terms, standing against, that's more kind of confrontational, isn't it?

You just kind of slip by out and against in and before you know it, that kind of conveys some kind of confrontation with the person that you're standing against. You're opposed to that person.

No one really kind of likes that, although sometimes there are people in this world and I'm not one of them. I tend to kind of shy away from confrontation a little bit, but some people, you know, do better with confrontation and sometimes actually kind of deepen relationships with people through confrontation if it kind of comes through in terms of clarifying what's the confrontation about or if there was a preceding confrontation and there needs to be some kind of resolution or reconciliation.

[12 : 50] Not altogether a bad thing, but then there's also the idea of standing in front of someone, actually someone actually who's in front of another person and the other one following. That's a great perspective in terms of a relationship with Jesus Christ who does stand in front of us.

He's the one who leads. We're the ones who actually follow him. And so standing in front isn't necessarily a negative thing, but it does imply that someone's actually ahead of you, someone who maybe knows more than you do and you're the one who's following and so they're the expert. It's not what we're talking about here when we think about standing by someone. But then there's the other idea of standing for someone. That is actually in the place of someone. And good in the Christian life, that's what we need, someone to stand actually for us in place of us when we think of the atonement and the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

He stands for us, does for us what we can't actually do for ourselves. He stands for us in our place, as it were. But we're talking about standing by.

That is someone who's beside you or someone who's with you. Someone who's like you, not that Jesus isn't like us because he is. There are obviously ways in which he isn't like us and sinned not. But here we have this idea of someone standing with us or beside us there connected with us hopefully provides some kind of source of strength for us as companions on a journey as it were.

[14:16] So standing by is what we're talking about here. And then this last word, me, standing by me. Now we live in an I culture and not that the idea of I in and of itself is necessarily a bad thing.

I think of Martin Buber's book I and Thou. I don't know if you read that but obviously it's the position of God being the subject, the ultimate, and we actually being with him but separate from him. And there is that relationship between God who is other than us and yet there beside us.

But we do live in this I culture of iTunes and iPods and iPads and iPhones, the whole kind of I culture, right? I, I, I. And here we have this phrase, stand by me, which doesn't actually necessarily put me at the center of this but it does convey something about someone standing with us, beside us, which is what we all need, I think.

We need someone to stand by us as we walk through this, this journey of faith that we have. I think of Christian in the Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan, right?

There are lots of times where he's standing, walking as it were by himself but there are times at which there's someone who comes along beside of him, right? Right? So, so evangelist comes alongside of him, doesn't he?

[15:38] And faithful comes along. There's lots of other people who come alongside of him, probably more, who don't necessarily stand with him and beside him but will stand kind of against him and tempt him and trip him up.

So anyway, I just love this phrase, stand by me, and that's kind of what we're thinking about today. We're not standing by ourselves, we're not standing alone, someone's actually standing with us, we're actually standing with someone else.

And, but all of this actually, the idea of pastoral care, I think, which is what this is about, is set in the context of the Christian tradition. There's something distinctively Christian, I think, about, about the kind of care that we offer, the love that we offer to one another.

It's within the church. And so I started thinking about this and this may not seem really connected with pastoral care but just bear with me for a second. I wanted to kind of raise the question, well, what today is, but for that what today isn't.

And I know that you all know that today isn't Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, or all things. Those all kind of have some things in common, which they're major feasts in the Christian year.

[16:51] But it's also, one of the things that got me kind of thinking about this in terms of pastoral care and what we do here at Learners Exchange, which is a form of care in itself as we teach about the Christian faith.

We're caring for one another in terms of content, in terms of history, in terms of theology, in terms of the way that we engage with our Lord and one another in this Christian life.

There was not that long ago that Bev Greenwood came and she taught on William Tyndale. Do you remember that? What a great teaching that was. I asked her afterwards, how did you choose that day to teach on William Tyndale?

And she said, well, they asked me and we found a date that I was available and so we decided that that's the day that I would teach. And I said to her, do you know that that was the day in the Anglican church calendar that we remember William Tyndale?

She said, no, I didn't know that. Did you guys know that? I think it was just a coincidence. What do you think? No. There's no such things as coincidences. It was what some people call a God incidence.

[17 : 58] And I don't want to make too much of this, but I do think that something about pastoral care is that, one, there are other saints.

And interesting enough, the term saint is never used in the Bible. It's always in the plural. Saints. There are other saints, the communion saints that we walk on. Some of these literally walk beside us, but there's other ones who have actually walked before us.

And they provide something by way of instruction for pastoral care. And I just thought that was really interesting. And we do hear occasionally in terms of details like that, the devil's in the details. And some of us actually believe that, but I don't. I just think that God is into the details of our life, even ones like that. In every detail, especially in those kind of areas and incidents where we really need some kind of care and love from someone else.

He's into those sorts of details. It's the devil who generalizes and accuses. He's not really into the details of life unless he can somehow kind of leverage them to tempt us and get us off the track.

[19 : 01] Now, I think it's God who's in the details. I wish that I were more of a detailed person. I know some people are more inclined that way, but that can be really helpful. Well, it's not the remembrance of, I'll race through this, Cranmer, Latimer, and Ridley.

And that would be an interesting conversation in terms of pastoral care around here as well. And it's also not the remembrance of St. Stephen the Martyr, though I am talking about a Stephen ministry. So it would be interesting to that coincide. But it didn't. Well, here's what maybe today is. You've got to hang with me here a little bit. People call this month Movember, don't they?

And I'm just kind of looking around for people. I don't see anyone who's grown a mustache recently. And I just don't really know what to think of Movember, to be honest with you. Well, I'll tell you in a second when I think about it.

But as you know, it's motivated, you know, for men and their health care, prostate cancer, other forms of cancer, mental health issues are named as well.

[20 : 06] And that's why men grow these mustaches, to draw attention to that. And I wonder about that. There's something about that that is well-meaning, I'm sure. But nevertheless, I'll come to, in a second, when I think about that.

I don't know if you know this, but two days ago was Brother's Day. You know, we got Father's Day, we got Mother's Day. There's now a Mother's Day. It's November the 21st. I gather there's a sister's, what did I say?

Sorry, Brother's Day. I gather there's a Sister's Day as well. I got phone calls and texts from my fraternity brothers when I was in university. I had no idea there was such a thing as a Brother's Day. But, but I know, it is kind of funny and laughable, isn't it? I must admit, I didn't send kind of texts back or my brothers, some of my brothers who are in here send texts to them and say, you know, you really make a difference, those sorts of things.

Well, that's what Friday was. This is the octave before the Remembrance of Andrew. So, the Remembrance of Andrew is on November the 30th.

[21 : 10] It's the way that we mark the first Sunday of the beginning of Advent, the Sunday that's closest to that. And so, that is a week from today. So, that's what today is about. And, of course, this is the last Sunday before Advent then, which is called, you've got the clue up there, Stir Up Sunday, which is related to our collect.

There are other kinds of traditions around that too that have to do with fruit and those sorts of things. But really, I just love the phrase in the collect, Stir Up the Wills of Thy Faithful People, O God.

It is a great collect. And the whole collect in the prayer book are a pastoral tradition. I mean, the Book of Common Prayer is a doctrinal tradition.

It's a liturgical tradition. It is a biblical tradition. It's also a pastoral tradition. The collect really guide us. They guard us. They goad us, as it were, in terms of our life of following Jesus and great ways to be cared for and to care for others pastorally through things like the collects as we learn them and say them year after year after year after year.

Those are worth committing to memory. I would never advocate that you memorize collects before you memorize Scripture, but I would come pretty close. And I tell my children and have told them, you know, the most important book to read is the Bible, but second to that is the Book of Common Prayer.

[22 : 33] It really is. And everything else that we read. I don't know. I don't know that the statistics have been done. It would be interesting to do that if other than the Bible there were any other book that were published more than the Book of Common Prayer.

It would be interesting when you think how widely it was used in Great Britain and the United Kingdom throughout the world. But anyway, the world in which we live in doesn't include the publication of and the sales of the Bible in the best-selling book.

And neither would they the Book of Common Prayer either, I gather. Well, this Sunday is also in some traditions called Christ the King. And that's just a focusing on Jesus' reign and rule in the world in which we live in before we now go into the season of Advent when we anticipate his return once again.

And that's a pretty important tradition as well. I know kind of growing up in the tradition that I did that there was a lot of focus on Jesus as the Savior and the one who died on the cross for my sins. which was great but not much focus or at least it didn't get through to me and that may say more about me than it did my tradition but about Jesus' rule and reign over our life.

[23 : 40] So anyway, those are what some of the things are and that's all to say that it's really kind of important to know kind of where we are in terms of giving and receiving pastoral care.

And if we don't decide what we're going to do as we move through this life, somebody else will. So someone will come along and tell you that something like November is really important and which in the grand scheme of things and all due respect to men or maybe women who have lost men to things like prostate cancer, there are things that are of greater importance than that.

But today is also the remembrance of Clement. I don't know how many of you know Clement. I raise this because he provided pastoral care to people. He was a bishop towards the end of the first century and he was a bishop in Rome and he provided care not only to the church in Rome but he also provided care to the church in Corinth.

And he was actually a living figure who was in Rome and he was the bishop of that city. And he wrote a letter around 96 to the church in Corinth and Irenaeus of Lyons is what it was pronounced then with an S now it's Lyon as you know in France.

He identifies in 202 Clement and then in the 4th and the 6th centuries there are also authors who write about Clement also.

[25 : 12] They claim that he was a martyr. I don't know if that can be confirmed for sure or not but nevertheless I just want to draw some attention actually to this letter that he wrote. You can get it easily. It's divided up into 58 sections and in the English translation it's about 13,000 words.

It's obviously not in the canon but there are some really things that are quite commendable about it. And the circumstances were in Corinth not that much different they were when Paul wrote to them and in his letter that is Clement's he talked about a shameful and detestable sedition that there were sudden and successive calamitous events and of course there was a persecution that was going on as well.

and so he's kind of drawing attention to this but here's the thing that I want to focus on just in terms of pastoral care. This is how he kind of frames pastoral care when he talks about a whole host of things with this church including things like humility and hospitality and honor and just about care for households.

It was a letter that was very much like Paul's pastoral letters in the beginning which one expressed in the empire of the time in the middle in the end the way he closed them and the doctrine that was included in it and also the application of that in terms of some of the circumstances that were going on that a bishop needed to address where he needed to say some words of warning but also pointing people to Christ and also the grace of God.

But here's what he says about the church the one spirit of grace poured out upon us which breathes on the various members of the body of Christ where all united without any divisions are members of one another.

[26 : 53] So he's addressed addressing this division that's going on which existed from when Paul wrote the letter to them and all the conflict as well. But the image that he holds of the church in which he speaks into pastorally is this one of the body of Christ the one that Paul talked about to the same church there, right?

And members of one another isn't that really important in terms of when we think about caring for one another? We are not disconnected from one another we care for one another we're members

of one another we're related to one another and the body imagery suggests that and that has great implications for the way that we care for one another and then one of the things that his letter has that Paul's don't is this kind of closing prayer of course Paul has prayers he's got one in Philippians right at the beginning of the letter and he's got two in Ephesians and but there's one this great prayer that comes at the end and interestingly enough it's very close to the structure of our colics in the anger of tradition listen to this prayer that closes his letter and then I'll move on from Clement and to other subjects but this is how he closes his letter may God who sees all things and who is the ruler of all spirits and the Lord of all flesh who chose our Lord Jesus Christ and us through to be a peculiar people lovely phrase isn't it?

grant to every soul that calls upon his glorious and holy name faith fear peace patience long suffering self-control purity and sobriety to the well-pleasing of his name through our high priest and protector Jesus Christ to whom be to him glory and majesty and power and honor both now and forever more and it ends with amen isn't that a great prayer?

what I love about it is that it has a similar structure with one piece absent to our colleagues in addition to the content there and he's he's clearly kind of praying for them this is his prayer for them and so he addresses God he acknowledges who God is and then he has this petition it doesn't have an aspiration which the colleagues have that is if you get what you ask for what difference will it make?

they're often kind of the clue there is the word so that and then in the collect then once you've received what you've requested it's given to you well anyway here's Clement who gave pastoral care to a community as a pastor and saw to it that there were others there who he addresses at the end who were giving that kind of care for them as well so our pastoral care happens in a context I'll race through this kind of quickly but these are some of the ways in which we think of our life together and we care for one another as a body of Christ that comes from 1 Corinthians 12 verse 2 but we're also the church is a temple so Ephesians 2 22 we're a covenant people there's lots of things that we've heard from this sermon series on Ezekiel but one of it is that they will be my people and I will be their God they will know that I am the Lord their God there's this covenant relationship of course the priesthood of all believers which is in 1 Peter chapter 2 9 the prophethood of all believers isn't actually biblical but St. Augustine actually talks about that so that we speak [30:15] God's word into one another's life there's this prophetic calling as it were the vocation of the church and not only to one another as we care but to the world in which we live in and then also the household of God 1 Timothy 3 15 so at St. John's I don't know when you think of pastoral care my area of responsibility is in the area of love there's an area of faith there's an area of love there's worship and witness as well isn't there but I think it's really worth noting that these three areas actually of faith hope and love are all brought to bear when it comes to pastoral care that when we care for one another or you care for someone or someone cares for you it's not about loving you only though I'll grant you how important that is we all know that Paul comes to chapter 13 in his first letter to the church in Corinth and he gives this long list of what love isn't and what love is and at the end of that he says faith hope and love and the greatest of these is love right and that doesn't mean that faith and hope aren't important and I remember when I was first around St. John's one of the first sermons I preached was actually on February 14th and the text was 1 Corinthians 13 which was a lot of fun it was during the time of the Olympics so this was 2010 and I often thought

I didn't say this then and my Stephen ministry I think it was my Stephen ministry leaders and ministers I shared this with them and thought well it's good that you didn't actually share this but I thought you could have said faith, hope, and love and love gets the gold and because really it is gold it's better than gold isn't it you have faith and hope too maybe they're silver and bronze or they tie as it were but it doesn't mean that faith and hope aren't important they really are but for some reason Paul says love the greatest of these is love but when we care for people we're encouraging people in faith aren't we and we know that when something is going difficult in our life there's some darkness in our life it isn't all about love there's this element of faith in that isn't there where we try to strengthen people's faith there's something particularly Christian about the way that we care and that we love people and that's this element of this element of faith and there's content to that in terms of our biblical faith our creedal faith our canonical faith right conciliar faith there's something there that's going on in the midst of the care that people need and that we give to them when we're caring for one another there's that aspect of faith in addition to people increasing in their trust and their belief and their kind of leaning into God you know as it were maybe if they're going through

some kind of grief or other kind of loss not avoiding that or denying it or drawing back from it but leaning into that aspect and leaning through it almost as it were into our Lord's hands so that's the faith there's the element of hope isn't it trying to help people to endure and to remain steadfast that's a word that Paul uses in 1 Thessalonians chapter 1 he doesn't want to talk about faith hope and love in Corinthians he does it right at the beginning of 1 Thessalonians 1 Thessalonians chapter 1 verse 2 he says this in verse 3 encouraging the church there to remain steadfast and he's heard about their steadfastness and hope this idea of being steadfast in hope one commentator said is being active it's an act of constancy in the face of extreme difficulty like that in terms of steadfastness with respect to hope it's active constancy in the face of extreme difficulty people need need to be encouraged in terms of hope not just love when they go through something that's very very difficult very dark very dire might bring about some kind of despair so that that that constancy and that can't be done alone

I don't think it requires someone to stand by to stand by you when that's the case and so the last element is love which is what I'll talk about the rest but I want to I want to share with you a little bit about what Stephen ministry does as a particular way of standing by other people standing by me standing by you and this is a ministry that's about 35 years old and it was initiated by a pastor in St. Louis from the Lutheran tradition but it's an interdenominational tradition that's throughout all of the English speaking world and so it is what's important to know is that it's a that it's a system of care what happens is when someone cares for you in this way but in other ways as well someone does come alongside of you sometimes that happens informally sometimes it actually happens formally but someone comes alongside of you and walks walks beside you but in this case it's actually a whole system it's not just a person not that just a person isn't important people caring for people is really but this whole system of care includes includes leadership it includes the applying of what is taught there's training in it along with the equipping of people who care for one another it also requires actually as a system identifying those people who actually need care and sometimes people will ask for care but there are some times when people don't ask for care and one of the responsibilities in terms of pastoral care and loving people in a congregation is that those people are identified somehow and some people won't self-select and so it's about helping identify people who might need care as well obviously it's about caring which is there and I'll come to something else in a second about with respect to caring but also tracking with people one of the things that's really hard in terms of caring and loving and providing hope and faith for people in difficult circumstances how do you give continuous actually care with people and we do that because our Stephen ministers which we'll talk about later are in actually relationships after they've been trained and paired up with people that are peer supervision and continuing education so there's this kind of tracking that's going on to make sure that people receive consistent care

I remember reading once in Omri Nowen's book Creative Ministry which he touches on all of the kind of classic aspects of ministry you know including preaching and teaching and leading and worship he includes pastoral care too and he talks about actually in that the importance of if in the medical profession there are notes written for your care maybe we should be doing something like that in terms of pastoral care for people as well and you couldn't do that actually on everyone that you care for in every little way but we actually do some of that in Stephen ministry in terms of providing some kind of consistent conscientious competent care for people and it also means not only training but remaining with people until they're seen through their circumstances so this is kind of the motto of Stephen ministry we say that can you read that Stephen ministry it's Christ caring for people through people and sometimes we can think that our care for people we're focused on the care that other people need and our giving of that care but sometimes we start thinking about ourselves and where is Christ in the midst of this but really all in all what's so distinctive about Christian care is that it's Christ caring for people through people and so through us and by the work of Jesus Christ and his spirit and the Father

I mean there's something quite Trinitarian I mean this is Christocentric which is really important but the whole Trinity is actually in the care involved in the care of people under the life circumstances Tertullian also knew of Clement as well and spoke of him and Tertullian as maybe you know he's the one who coined the phrase Trinity and I can't help but think I haven't read I haven't read Tertullian but as I just kind of think of it there's a Trinitarian aspect to caring for people as I think of the fathers of the promise or the promises of the father that are laden in scripture that encourage people in difficult circumstances the presence of the son right Christ's presence is real and with us in all circumstances of life especially those that are difficult but not only those the ones that merit

thanksgiving and celebration too but also the power of the Holy Spirit is effective in our life to bring about radical transformation in our lives if not our circumstances and sometimes we'd love for our circumstances to be changed when it's difficult don't we but sometimes that's just not going to happen and I read something once which I thought was really helpful one of the most helpful things I've actually read recently about pastoral care and that is the promise of perfect health isn't until we've actually died and gone to heaven and so that promise is for us now but not perfect health before then right and I think that helps give perspective to our life and the circumstances that we face

[39 : 38] I wish I wish that lots of our circumstances could be changed but what I know is that the power of the Spirit affect them in our life because of who Jesus Christ is we learn that his grace is sufficient to sustain us through all those and we wish the pain that would go away for whatever the case may be but sometimes it's not realistic and it's not promised until we get to heaven I know that may be a hard thing to hear but we know that's real isn't it that it's true and that's part of the hope that we long for and so this is about Christ caring for people through people and I brought some people here today that are going to share what it was like to receive care from someone but also what it was like to give care to but I just want to draw our attention before I do that to this and that is Christ's mission and also the church's mission as you know Jesus stood up in a synagogue and he read from Isaiah and these are the words that he read the spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news of the poor he has sent me to proclaim liberty of the captives and recovery of sight to the blind and to set at liberty those who are oppressed to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and obviously Jesus says then he you know he's saying that he's the one who's fulfilled this and this day this reading has been fulfilled in your hearing and this is a really kind of pastoral mission isn't it and this is Jesus' mission

I don't think the church's mission has changed much from this today and it includes the proclamation of the good news to the poor to all people those who are poor those who are poor in spirit right that's the first thing that he's been sent for this and anointed for this to proclaim the good news also to proclaim liberty to the captives all kinds of captives literally those who are slaves and captives many of us are captive to one thing or another aren't we who it is that we think that we are but we're not in Christ in terms of our true identity who are we really in Christ there are all kinds of ways in which we think of ourselves that just are not consistent with biblical thinking about what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ things that we drag into and that hold us captive Jesus would just love to liberate us from free us from forgive us of our sins and free us for service in his kingdom but also recovery of sight to the blind I love it when Jesus restores the sight of the blind you know and it's a signal to actually what he's come to do not only just to give someone their sight literally but we're blind spiritually as well aren't we we don't see

Jesus for who he is and it takes him to heal our sight in terms of faith hope and love and then also to set at liberty those who are oppressed and then again to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor which may be in reference to the Jubilee which is what people think but there are other kinds of years or days of the Lord's favor like the Sabbath that are important to be mindful of as well and so that that mission still exists for the church today let me just share with you then some values of Stephen ministry which are compassionate full of faith skilled and trustworthy these this is called what is it that we call this the caregiver's compass thank you thank you that's one of our Stephen leaders and you'll want people like that to be a Stephen leader okay very quickly then before I invite some people up what we're about is actually giving compassionate care to people making sure that people know that they're being cared for when someone comes and cares for you and also being full of faith you want someone who really knows what the faith is and so when they're listening and you're sharing that you know that there's an element of faith that's being brought to bear in the care that you receive also that that there's some competency in terms of what they know about caring for people and that's where the element of being skilled comes in so you want to have some real people who have had some training and who are not professionals though but that can give some kind of clear care for you in a very particularly

Christian way in addition to the faith and then finally the last thing is being trustworthy I'm going to move through a number of slides here but the last one that I want to share is being trustworthy and that's just a safe place where you can come where you know is actually confidential and there's going to be a lid as it were on what's being shared with you and it's not going to be shared with anyone else and I love I want to kind of just share with you this kind of image that won't come up

here but just out of an image of a house if you think about it right and if a house were that place of kind of trustworthiness and also in terms of care that you kind of walk into you have a foundation in the house and the foundation of the house is grace if you're going to be sharing something with someone in terms of the difficulty of your life you want to know that it's based actually on grace and that is not a kind of a cheap kind of a grace a kind of a grace that comes from Jesus Christ that keeps us from sinning but also covers our sin as it were because I know that when we're in difficult circumstances there's great temptation to sin and so you want that place to be a safe place of grace but not only that you've got walls as it were in your house too don't you and you want two walls in your house that you're entering into as you're receiving care you need to have a wall of listening someone's going to be attentive and aware of what it is that you're sharing and that person somehow conveys that they get what you're going through without minimizing it by saying I really understand what's happening but that's one wall of listening you want another wall of empathy as well so people are able to make observations about what you're going through but also even some interpretations of that and also expressing that back to you but those are the walls there are two other things that you want you want to have a roof on your house don't you this comes back to something I said earlier though but you need to have a roof knowing that everything is going to stay under that lid don't you that it's confidential that it's not going to be shared with someone else and sometimes we hesitate to actually share things with people because we don't know if it's going to go to somewhere else so what someone else might think about when we share something especially if it has to do with something of a sinful nature or maybe of some way that we are actually treated so you need to have this kind of roof that keeps that trustworthiness through confidence and then finally the door I don't know what you think the door needs to represent but the door that you're going to walk through that you have to have when someone cares for you this is what we say in terms of Steve ministry but it applies to everything doesn't it when you care for someone or someone cares for you in order to walk through the door in the first place there needs to be trust right some of the things that

[46 : 40] I've already said are related to that but at the beginning and at the middle and at the end there needs to be a great deal of trust that is as it were promised and guaranteed and so you walk through that door you want to know that person is someone that you can really trust and that's what we want to do it's a trustworthy place so I want to invite forward Christina Nielsen she's a Stephen leader and she's going to share with you just a little bit about what it means to be a Stephen leader it's a system where we have Stephen ministers and Stephen leaders and she's a Stephen leader and so Christina if you just come forward and share a little bit what it's like to be a Stephen leader at St.

John's thank you James I believe that God's word comes first from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ the father of mercies and the God of all comfort who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the same comfort we receive from God for as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too as James said we are family it's the responsibility of every member of the congregation to look out for each other to help each other to encourage each other as the saying goes a burden shared is a burden halved and that's what we do as family that's how we fulfill the commandment to share the hope of Christ enter Stephen ministry it's a lay ministry volunteer as James has said but we are accountable to each other and to the Stephen leadership like the moon in the first line of the song that James has just introduced you to the stand by me song we should be reflecting the light of Christ that's the light the only light that people see when they are in a very dark place and they have a Stephen minister come speak to them and stand by them it's a team ministry too it's very important that we have more than one leader to counsel among us because situations can get complicated and there are many responsibilities involved I need to tell you a little bit about what Stephen leaders do or rather how that's impacted me because James has given you much of the rundown we help provide a vision for the ministry and the church and for the congregation but also to do a little bit of publicity building awareness of the ministry so that people will know that there is somewhere to go or something to recommend other people to do we do the referrals to identify people who are in need of care and connect them to appropriate Stephen ministers based largely on spiritual gifts who is someone who can stand by you who has the gifts that you need at this time we provide ongoing supervision it's peer supervision but we

facilitate the group and continuing education for the Stephen ministers our service term is two years but it is renewable but as you can imagine if Stephen ministers are finished in only two years there would be a constant need to replenish that so we try to get other people in the congregation involved and to train new groups of ministers all the time otherwise it would not remain vibrant and strong as a ministry I went to a leadership conference in August so I've only recently started as a Stephen leader in this church it was a six day training as you can imagine that's quite detailed and it covers everything from administrative issues to confidentiality training and continuing education and to the spiritual aspects of communicating

Christ that's the heart of the ministry because Stephen ministry has been going on for so many years they have a vast array of literature and all sorts of support information this Christian care giving a way of life is one of the books we work through to become Stephen ministers but there's way more stuff available than we actually need but it does mean that there's a broad spectrum of things that we can look into in order to get specifically what we need one of the things I love about Stephen ministry is that they are well organized and they are extremely well supported so it's a great go to place when we run into situations with our group where we need some specifics and some support the how to stuff we're not reinventing the wheel all the time it's already done we just need to pick those pieces that are important to our situations at this meeting there were a lot of small group discussions and activities that helped us to better personalize the strategies for our church whether our church has 60 people or 6,000 people there are different ways of dealing with pastoral care you might be familiar with one of the books they use journeying through grief it's actually a series of four booklets that's used for people who are going through grieving time that's the sort of thing that

[52 : 21] Stephen ministry provides lots of for many other situations too the peer supervision as the Stephen leader I facilitate the small group peer supervision and each person does a short report about their care receiver maintaining confidentiality mind you so we're discussing the situation not the person and the caring relationship not the person these meetings are every two weeks or bi-monthly if it's every two weeks then they gain one meeting every half year or something like that the other Stephen ministers will comment and encourage and ask questions this is a set of questions that's designed to cover all areas like the caring relationship the needs of the caregiver the needs of the care receiver and this sort of resource helps us to really focus on dealing with what's going on at the moment and how to move forward so again we're not reinventing the wheel we're using a system that's been very effective for more than 30 years in 14,000 congregations around the world it works in many denominations it's very it's an excellent resource we don't always stick to it but it's a go to place even the steven ministers who don't happen to have care receivers attend because they can offer support and encouragement and evaluation of what's going on which is so helpful to us it's a real blessing to us not not only do we help share the burdens but then when there are the joys of breakthroughs and healing we get to share in that joy too so as the leaders it's an even bigger joy because it's not now just the one on one but it's the joys shared through all the steven ministers so it's a bigger bounty so to speak we feel after these meetings we

I think we feel re-energized to return to the mission field as it were secondly continuing education also happens once a month so there's a continuing need to to learn strategies and to learn to listen more carefully fully fully trusting that Christ is the cure giver we only learn how to deal with care but the cure comes from Christ through the Holy Spirit working in us we're the support we're the confidential safety net we're not really setting out to fix people like you saw in the logo there's a broken person and a whole person that's not our job Christ does that we're just there to help them hang on until they are in the healing process so there's less of a burden on us to do what you need to do to fix somebody it's not goal oriented it's process oriented staying with them giving them hope we benefit from learning about all the needs that are that we might be called to walk through and how to pray effectively skill building and particularly the devotions to strengthen our own spiritual muscles this is all within the realm of continuing education which we do monthly

I don't think a lot of people in the congregation realize what a huge asset this is to the congregation as a whole helping the church be the church in many ways it frees up the pastoral staff as well to oversee the congregation as a whole to minister to the flock as a whole and to help them identify who needs care so if those identifications are then matched up with Stephen ministers they're free to deal with urgent issues as well as identifying those who need care the long term personal commitment of the ministry also helps bond the congregational members it's not just need based

but among ourselves the Stephen ministers are among my most trusted friends we bond in these bi-monthly meetings we keep in touch we learn from each other and we pray for each other what better way to build a

Christian family coming coming back to what James said earlier I'd like to close with a brief prayer from Eugene Peterson heavenly father I would not stand around in idleness talking about your will nor sit indolently reading about your will you have very graciously put shoes on my feet so that I can go out and proclaim the gospel of peace I am well able now by your grace to walk in your will in the power of the Holy Spirit Amen