

Bonds flourish with God's restraint

Lord inspires through love, not domination

The following are excerpts from a sermon prepared for delivery March 9 by Greg Merlo, pastor at Georgetown Community Church:

My 4-year-old son thinks he's a superhero: Dinoboy. He'll tell you he's stronger than everyone in the world, except God. For better or for worse, my son thinks God is the ultimate superhero. He simply accepts that God is powerful enough to do whatever He wants. I'm not sure if that's a healthy perspective or not. It certainly raises questions in my mind. If God is really that powerful, why doesn't God intervene more to clean up the mess we've made in our world? Why does God have to be so gosh darned mysterious?

Sometimes I wish God would step in and end all of the pain and suffering in the world. I wish I could just meet Jesus for coffee sometime. I wish I could explain to my 6-year-old daughter how it is that God is right here in the room with us, but we can't see him, or hear him or smell him, for that matter.

Perhaps we can look to Jesus' encounter with the devil in the wilderness for answers. There, in a sense, the ultimate hero faced the ultimate villain, described in Matthew 4:8-10.

Although it is difficult to grasp what the scene (in that passage) may have looked like, I assure you there were no red tights or pitchforks on hand. This temptation targeted Jesus' mission to save the world. Soon after this encounter, Jesus

Church's small size a plus for fellowship

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Other churches may worry about growing their congregation, but Greg Merlo, pastor of Georgetown Community Church, sees his group's small size as one of its best points. Having only about 40 people at the weekly service creates a strong sense of community and belonging, he said.

"One of the blessings of being a smaller church is that you walk through the door, and someone is going to notice you and welcome you in," Mr.

Merlo said. "That availability is great. It's easier to come in and really connect with the community as a whole, probably more so than some larger congregations."

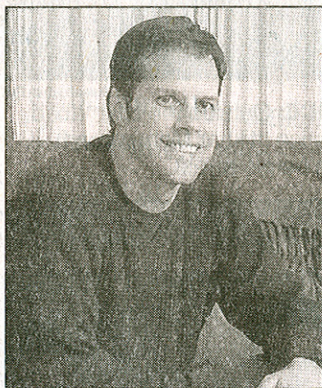
Because of its small size, the congregation, which meets Sunday evenings in the United Church in the 1900 block of G Street NW, is able to have dinner together in the church basement after the service. Two Sundays a month, members organize potluck meals, with pizza or lasagna nights in

between, Mr. Merlo said.

The weekly dinners and family atmosphere help foster another dimension important to the church — its ministry to the homeless.

"We've tried to not only be a ministry to the homeless, but minister with the homeless," Mr. Merlo said. "We have them come in and be a part of the church. It seems like that effort to really connect with others that are different than us is kind of a strength of our group."

— Amy Doolittle



Greg Merlo

GEORGETOWN COMMUNITY CHURCH

Founded in 2001 as a nondenominational congregation

Location: 1920 G St. in Northwest

Pastor: Greg Merlo

Services: 5 p.m. Sunday

Web site: www.georgetowncommunity.org

The Washington Times

would proclaim, "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15). The kingdom of God is, simply put, the realm where God's will is accomplished, whether in heaven or on Earth. Jesus came to restore our relationship with God and help us live life as God intended.

The devil offered Jesus a shortcut: "Worship me." The devil wasn't just trying to con-

vince Jesus to get on His knees or sing a song. In true worship, we become like the object of our worship. The devil was saying, "If you do things my way, you can get what you want: the world will submit to you." In the three temptations, he was challenging Jesus to accomplish his mission by giving them whatever they want, impressing them with dazzling miracles, and forcing them into submission.

But here's the problem: God's will is not just a list of "dos and don'ts." Jesus teaches that the greatest commandment is "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." And the second is "Love your neighbor as yourself."

In order to fulfill these commands, we must have the choice to receive him or reject him. Without that freedom, it isn't really love at all. In the wilderness, Jesus knew that He had ultimate power at his disposal. But, rather than using his power to fix the world and force humanity to do the right thing, He exercised the power of restraint. He knew that the only thing that could truly inspire a response of love was love itself.

Rather than forcing His will on us, Jesus accepted rejection, suffered persecution and died on a cross. Jesus took the full force of our sins upon himself and experienced the punishment we deserve. Jesus made his appeal to us through His



own steady, gentle, self-sacrificial love. Jesus revealed God's passionate love for each one of us with the hope that we might be inspired to love God, worship God and serve Him only.

Last week, my son, Dinoboy, was at preschool when a little girl noticed he had a toy she wanted. She walked up behind him, grabbed a handful of hair and yanked as hard as she could. His teachers were amazed. It obviously hurt a lot, but he didn't yell or even try to retaliate. The teacher was very stern with the girl and sent her to timeout. When she rejoined the class, she came up next to Dinoboy to help him clean up the toys. The teachers, uncertain about what would happen next, watched intently. To their surprise, Dinoboy turned to the little girl and said with a smile, "Good job. Now you are letting your light shine."

No kidding.

Isn't this a beautiful picture of how God exercises his "superpowers" in our world? God's restraint and forgiveness, rather than forceful domination, inspires love and opens the door for relationships to form where, together, we can clean up this mess we've made.

Let your light shine.

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