SERMON – Oct. 1, 2006

Mark 9 “Compensation”

G&P...

Phyllis Elshof was running a few weeks ago when something snapped in my left hip. One minute she was loping along, the next she was yelping in pain. She had to hobble home.

Within days, that tiny hairline break at the top of her femur threw her entire body off. Her left hip hurt, sure, but so did the right one. When she biked, her knee started screaming. By the time she was evaluated by a physical therapist, she was hugging banisters to negotiate stairs, trading heels for sneakers, and chugging Aleve.

What in the world was happening?

"Compensation," said the therapist. Her right hip hurt because she was covering for the injury in the left one. Likewise, her left knee hurt from diverting stress on her hip. The entire band of muscle stretching from her left hip to her knee had even tightened to protect the injury.

How like sin in our lives. You think one broken area isn't a problem, but you soon find yourself covering for it, and before you know it you are suffering in other areas as well. Sin always requires "compensation."

Phyllis Ten Elshof, West Chicago, Illinois

In the text this morning Jesus gives us a warning and a promise. He goes right to the heart of the matter. How are you and I conducting our lives in regards to ourselves and to our neighbor, especially those in our community who are most vulnerable? He begins with a good word about those who were not a part of the followers of Jesus who were casting out demons in Jesus name.

Whoever is not against us is for us. Whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will be by no means lose his reward.

We are okay up to this point. But now Jesus gives us stern warning. If anyone one of causes one of these little ones, as he points to the children, to stumble into sin, if would be better that your feet were placed in a vat of wet cement and you went to swim with the fishes. If your hand is used to hurt another person, it is no good to you or anyone else, cut it off. If your foot is used to walk away from someone in need, it is no good to you or anyone else, cut it off. If your eye looks on as sin is happening

and you do nothing to help the neighbor, it is no good to you or anyone else, pluck it out.

For it is better to go into the kingdom of God maimed, than not at all!

Now if I am a disciple listening to these words, I am thinking that I hope that he means this as a metaphor or parable. Because I need my hand, and foot and eye. We do not want to be maimed because of our sin and our stumbling, this is what sin means, we stumble. There must be a better word.

Jesus is straight with us. It is a warning that our conduct and how we live our lives matters. It is a warning that if we live our life in a sinful way that hurts others especially the children among us, there will be grave consequences. Left to ourselves, we will sin, we will use our minds and bodies to cause sin and stumbling among us. Left to ourselves, the darkness of our time will only get darker. Left to ourselves, death will reign.

During the nine months Erik Amundsen spent at a Bible college in Quito, Ecuador, he learned more than what was taught in the classroom. The 18-year-old from suburban Chicago also discovered the risk of flirting with danger.

On February 5, 2005, Erik and some of his fellow classmates visited a bullfight in the outskirts of the Ecuadorian capital. When the stadium announcer invited those in the stands to enter the ring in an attempt to get as close to the bull as they could, the adventure-loving teen responded. Convinced he could sneak up behind the bull, touch its hindquarters and then bolt back to the stands, Eric approached the beast from behind.

Before Eric even touched the bull, the animal sensed his presence, turned around and charged. Erik defended himself by extending his arms in front of his body. Upon impact Erik was catapulted on top of the bull's head. The animal proceeded to throw the boy to the ground, and Erik landed on his neck. Before he could stand up and run, the bull charged him again, this time goring him in the right leg.

Erik was rushed to a Quito hospital for treatment. For two days he was unable to get out of bed. For two weeks he was unable to walk. For a month he could only walk with the aid of a cane.

"I was foolish to think I could get away with it," Erik told his pastor. "I guess I just thought I could get close and then and run away. I was wrong."

Greg Asimikopoulos, Naperville, Illinois

Left to ourselves, we can be just plain stupid.

But don't leave until you hear the promise. The promise is Jesus who brings balance to our lives so that we do not have to compensate. He brings the promise of forgiveness so that we do not have to lose our limbs and eyes. He brings the promise of reconciliation so that we can live in harmony with one another. This promise is more than just a promise somewhere in the future, but a promise that becomes a hope through the reality of his death and resurrection. Because Jesus does not want to leave us to ourselves! Because we cannot live that way, we will surely die without Jesus in our life, healing and forgiving us for the journey.

There is a cell phone commercial on TV in which there is a mother and a daughter who seem to be fighting. There voices are raised in what seems to be anger. They are ranting and raving at each other. But their words do not match what we perceive is argument.

"I love you and this is why I gave you this."

"I know you love me and I thank you very much."

"You are doing great in school."

"I will be home by midnight."

It is a total inversion of what we expect to happen. It is so good, I can't even tell you what cell phone that they are selling.

Jesus in his ministry was always inverting the way society lived. I want you to hear this warning that Jesus gives to his disciples and us inverted.

If anyone takes these little ones by the hand and teach them about God's grace and how to live it in the world, the angels in heaven will sing. If your hand causes you to reach out in grace to a neighbor, this grace will come back to you ten fold. If your foot causes you to walk across the street to help someone in need, know that Jesus walks with you. If your eye sees someone who has not heard the gospel, you will share it as the Spirit gives you the words to speak.

This is the salt of the kingdom of God. It gives flavor to the actions of the community of faith. It gives the needed preservation of the rich words of Grace. When we are hurt by what we have done or that others have done to us, it brings healing of the heart through the grace of our crucified and risen Lord Jesus.

I remember reading a story not long ago about the "elevated" in Chicago--a train that when it comes into the downtown, it's on a high track. A young man was riding that train day after day as a commuter. And as the train slowed up for the station where he got off, he could look through an open curtain into a room of a building and see a woman lying in a bed.

She was there day after day, for a long time, obviously quite ill. He began to get interested in her since he saw her every day. Finally he determined to find out her name. He discovered her

address, and he wrote her a card, assuring her that he was praying for her recovery. He signed it: "The young man on the elevated."

A few weeks later, he pulled into the station, and he looked through that window and the bed was empty. Instead there was a great huge sign:

GOD BLESS YOU, MY FRIEND ON THE ELEVATED!

William Hinson, "A Breath of Fresh Air," Preaching Today, Tape No. 114

That is the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ breaking in on this world, bringing hope and the good news of Jesus for life now and life to come.

Friends, come to the altar and be renewed in your faith by the grace of Jesus. Bring your wounds and heartaches and leave them at the altar and receive grace, grace that brings new life in all that we do.

AMEN