

McCabe United Methodist Church

Pastor Ray Baker

Straighten Up

8-22-10

Luke 13:10-17

I'm sure the majority of you have heard about the "Trojan Horse", from Greek mythology. Or you may remember the hit movie named: Troy; starring Brad Pitt, Eric Bana, and Orlando Bloom. It's a story about the battle between the Achaeans and the Trojans. It is actually taken from Virgil's epic poem *The Aeneid*, and it's part of the Iliad, a piece of classic Greek Literature. The story is about a man name Paris who took Helen from her husband and returned her to Troy, which is in modern day Turkey. The Achaeans (Greeks) tried to free Helen and regain their honor by laying siege to the city of Troy for ten years, but they could not breach its defenses. So they relied on deception and built a giant horse out of wood and hid thirty (30) soldiers inside.

The Greeks pretended to leave in defeat and they left the "Trojan Horse" behind as a tribute to the people of Troy. The Trojan people celebrated their victory by pulling the horse inside their walls and gorging themselves on a feast and drinking ample amounts of liquor. When the city grew quite the Achaeans breached the walls of the fortress from inside, let their countrymen in through the gates, and conquered the city in short order.

Today the "Trojan Horse" is part of a great ancient "Greek Myth" and part of our "Modern day Geek culture". The computer geeks of our day, specifically the hackers, who have a malicious nature and too much time on their hands developed computer virus called "the Trojan Horse."

Before the computer age people used the phrase: "Beware of Greeks bearing gifts."

Today we listen to the warning: "Beware of *geeks* bearing gifts."

The "Trojan Horse" virus is given this nickname because it is often attached to an advertisement promising you a "gift" or as part of a "pop up window" that offers you a free computer service. The computer hacker who prepares and sends out these virus makes you promises such as:

- "Make your computer faster!"
- "Is your computer at RISK?? Run our free security scan!"

Thousands of people have taken these ads at their word and downloaded innocent looking software to “scan, clean, or improve the speed of their computer.” But waiting inside these hollow horses is a digital army waiting to mount an invasion. Sometimes the programs scan for financial information and passwords. Other times they’re just a nuisance — slowing down a computer – or they wreak havoc on your computer by vandalizing part of your hard drive.

A computer watchdog agency reported in 2009 alone, there was a 583 percent increase in viruses being sent out through the use of these ads and popup windows.

The reason we are quickly taken in by the claims of ads and popup windows is we want to find a **“free” quick fix** for our computers and our daily lives. We have fallen for the marketing belief that we need a faster computer every six months, and this has planted the seed of dissatisfaction with current computer. But what about those of us who need to hold on to a computer for two or three years? Is there a quick fix for us? That’s where the “Trojan Horse” comes in.

This marketing ploy isn’t limited to our desire for a newer, faster, glitzy computer. We also fall for other advertisements:

- We want to lose weight, so we fall for the promise of a miracle drink that can help us lose 6 pounds in two days.
- We want the promise of staying younger naturally, so we turn to natural herbs for help.
- We are concerned about high medical cost so we turn to books like The One Minute Cure, which promises to cure diseases such as: aids, cancer, diabetes, emphysema, arthritis, heart disease, lung disease, and viral infections.
- We want to improve our golf game, so on a night ruled by insomnia we turn to the Home Shopping Network to buy the newest club to improve the weakest part of our game.
- We turn to the hair club for men, for men with thinning hair...wait a minute, that’s a little too personal.

Today’s gospel story is about a woman who experienced a crippling physical deformity for eighteen (18) years.

Stop and think about it: what were you doing eighteen years ago? How much has your life changed since then? Have you and your spouse had children and watched them grow into young women and men? Have you watched your children get married and have children of their own? Have you moved from working fulltime to living in retirement?

Eighteen (18) years is a long time.

When Jesus saw a bent over woman in the synagogue he called her to him and said: “Woman you are set free from your ailment.” He didn’t wait for her to come to him. He didn’t wait for her to make a profession of faith. He simply healed her and set her free from this crippling disease.

This is a great example of what John Wesley called Prevenient Grace God acts first in our lives, so we will know of God’s presence.

Based on other biblical stories we shouldn’t be surprised a priest spoke up and complained about Jesus working on the Sabbath. This happened numerous times. At the end of this confrontation Jesus blasted the priest for proclaiming a belief that is like the “Trojan Horse” Virus: he was saying one thing and doing another. Jesus exposed his willingness to give his animals’ food and water on the Sabbath and his lack of concern for a person in need.

There is a popular book in Christian circles named: *Unchurched*; by the Barna research group. They conducted a series of interviews with unchurched or de-churched people (those who have never attended church or those who have left the church) in order to learn how they perceive people who attend church.

One of the perceptions unchurched people have about church folk is we are hypocrites. OUCH! That’s right forty-four (44) percent of the people interviewed believe church folk saying one thing and then do another. Why do they feel this way? It has something to do with how they see us interact with people outside the church walls.

The book reports only fifteen (15) percent of the people interviewed see a difference between the way we treat people outside the church compared to how they see unchurched people treat the people around them.

As professing Christians we should live our lives in a manner that is noticeably different than people who don’t profess a faith in Christ. Right?

But this isn’t always the case. For example, I have spoken with the wait staff in different restaurants who say they would rather serve the bar crowd on Saturday night than the church crowd on Sunday morning. Why, because typically the Saturday night crowd is nicer, more tolerant, and they tip better. The bar crowd is nicer and more tolerant?

Since I need to take their perceptions seriously I asked myself the question: What does this say about me? Here are a couple of things I learned.

One of the common mistakes I make is I depersonalize the individuals who provide services for me. For example, I don't usually take the time to learn my waitresses name, I don't usually speak to the person who bags my groceries, I don't know my mail carriers name, or the names of the people who drive the garbage truck to my house ever Wednesday. All of these people make my life easier and I don't acknowledge them or their efforts.

Do you make similar mistakes?

The truly amazing thing is over seventy (70) percent of the people participating in the "Unchurched" study are willingness to sit down with a Christian and hear how Christ and the Church have made a difference in their lives.

In light of the observations by unchurched people it appears they are offering us the gift of grace in their willingness to hear us out. So there is hope!

The question becomes: How can we live differently to change people's perception of us? Because we do need to turn this around.

- Speak to our children and family members with respect in public and in private.
- Be complementary when we speak about our friends, speak as though they can hear what we're saying.
- Greet our servers by name and tip them 10% for doing their job and tip them more for doing their job well.
- Engage the people who take care of us in polite conversation.
- Say thank you or leave a thank you note for the people who make your life a little easier.
- Don't just put a Christian fish symbol on your car; instead, act like you're a Christian while you are driving or looking for a parking spot.

Have you heard the joke about a patrolman who pulled someone over because of their reckless and aggressive driving? When he stopped this car the owner was angry, abusive, and rude. So the patrolman placed the driver in the back seat of his patrol car and checked to see if this was a stolen car. A few minutes later the patrolman released the driver and

apologized, saying: I'm sorry, but I thought someone had stolen your car, because I couldn't believe someone with a Christian fish symbol and Christian bumper stickers would be abusive and rude to a police officer.

We, as members of the Church, need to live our lives in a genuine, authentic, and transparent manner. If we aren't honest about our shortcomings, our children and our guests in church will see right through the mask of perfection we are projecting.

You may remember that John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, said we are moving on to perfection. Well, he didn't say we had achieved perfection and we shouldn't pretend we have.

Instead we need to consider announcements like Pastor John Burke, in Austin TX. His church has the slogan "No Perfect People Allowed." A Colorado church welcomes people each week with the phrase "You are accepted here ... just as you are." In Las Vegas, Central Community Church says, "It's okay not to be okay." Another example is Dakotas UMC youth program which held an event called: "Christians under construction."

Remember today's gospel lesson? Jesus didn't ask the bent over woman to make a profession of faith before she was healed. He simply called her to him without asking a thing of her, and then he made a difference in her life: "When he laid his hands on her she stood up straight and Praised God."

We have the same opportunity, when we leave this sanctuary we can stand up and praise God in all we do, inside these walls and throughout the world.

Amen.