

16 May 2010 ***Creative Tension*** by Rusty Butler

Mt. 7:21-29 9:30 Romans 12:2

A few weeks ago, on Friday morning, we were reviewing Rabbi Harold Kushner's book, *Overcoming Fear*. In one of the chapters, Kushner had written in response to a question about natural disasters, "God is moral, nature is not." It was a somewhat controversial statement for some of us. Some thought that that was a good and true statement, some of us including myself, had problems with the anthropomorphism implicit in the statement. That is, we wondered about who makes the call on how moral God is. For those of us who took exception to the statement, it seemed far too dependent on what humans get to call moral. And God becomes Humanity writ large.

Doesn't work.

So we had a discussion on it. And then we set it aside and we went on to the next topic. Then this last week, I received an article from a former Iliff professor, the article was called, *By the Way, What is God?* The article made the case that what we call God is the sum total of the progressive evolving nature of morals in the human sphere...the advancement of universal morals. It was a good article and, for me, it made a strong case. I thought, now what am I supposed to think?

It set up a certain creative tension in my mind.

Do you remember those commercials a few years ago? It was usually a woman, she would be rubbing her forehead in a grimace of pain. There would be kids yelling in the background, or maybe a boss, and then the announcer would come on and would say something like, "Tension headache number 26." Do you remember those?

Tension...Not creative tension...that's a whole different thing.

We live day by day in creative tension.

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**Sometimes it is funny.**

**There were three sisters 92, 94 and 96 years old. They lived in a house together. One night the 96 year old draws a bath. She puts her foot in and pauses then yells to the other sisters, “was I getting in or out of the bath?” the 94 year old yells back, “I don’t know, I’ll come up and see.” She starts up the stairs and pauses to take a break. She hollers out, “Was I going up the stairs or down?” the 92 year old is sitting at the kitchen table having tea, listening to her sisters. She shakes her head and says, “I sure hope I never get that forgetful, knock on wood.” She then yells, “I’ll come up and help both of you as soon as I see who’s at the door!”**

**It’s funny, but I asked Lynn, Have I told this joke before?**

**And she said you could work that into the story. Three sisters 96, 94, and 92 and a pastor who’s 51, he can’t remember either.**

**Well, at any rate, we are going to talk about tension, about creative tension and how we live in it.**

**Would you pray with me?**

**O God may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts move us further along the road we call faith and understanding. Amen.**

### **Creative Tension**

**The sermon on the mount is a collection of teachings by Jesus. It covers a lot of ground. Subjects that deal with the relations between people, about ethics, about community, about how we are to act personally. You know much of it, blessed are the meek, blessed are the humble, blessed**

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**are the poor in spirit, blessed are the peacemakers, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.**

**The sermon contains instructions about what you do before other people and about how that is important. He talks about how if you give**

**a gift to church like everything is ok, but you've got a problem with a brother or sister, leave your gift and go take care of the problem.**

**He sets up some situations and tells what should be most significant. Talks about marriage and divorce, talks about the people who are opposed to you and how to turn the other cheek. Talks about not being worried about what one to wear, or eat, or drink. Near the end he says not everybody who says Lord, Lord will enter heaven.**

**You know the sermon on the mount.**

**Now the scholars say, this is most a collection of different Jesus sayings, that most likely Jesus didn't put all those jewels together in one sermon. That the writer of Matthew did that. The scholars are probably right but who knows?**

**It could have been this fantastic sermon...so let's say it's all in one sermon at the end of the sermon he concludes it by these words...**

**Whoever hears these words and does them is like a person who builds a house upon a rock and whenever the storm comes it will hold, but if you hear these words of mine and don't do them you build a home on sand and when the storm comes the home will be gone.**

**I read this week that a good sermon serves the purpose of helping people better understand God, better understand themselves, and better understand why God put them here in the first place." One fifty-something woman said, "I don't have any question about God — I take as a given that there is a God. I also believe in myself — I think**

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**therefore I am. What I could never really get from church on a regular basis was, “So What?” Why am I here? What does God want from me? Most churches I went to told me that my reason for being was to come to church, put money in the collection plate, attend Bible study and work in the kitchen whenever we had a supper. If that’s why God put us here... well, God needs to get out more.”**

**What is missing in most sermons – according to one survey is challenge.**

**Challenge! Some creative tension...**

**What are the most challenging things in your lives?**

**Relationships...**

**Money...**

**Direction...**

**Addictions...**

**We all have those... How do you heal relationships or be better in them or how do you end them with grace; how do you spend your money, how do you save your money, are you a good steward and what does that mean; do you feel like you are going in the right direction, or the church, or your community or the world for that matter, and why do you feel that way, how do you determine which direction is right for you? If you’re caught in the grip of addiction do you acknowledge it and can you find the help to get out?**

**That’s one type of challenge.**

**Another type of challenge is the challenge to grow in faith, or to act upon what you hear and what you learn, to do something in response to the sermon’s question.**

**Someone once said that Sermons are supposed to irritate in a positive way. Perhaps like a grain of sand in an oyster creates a pearl.**

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**I have five people who want to be on the Green Team at church. I have a leader someone who has volunteered to have us look at ways of being greener, that means you don't have to schedule the team to meet someone will do it for you, you don't have to come up with an agenda, you don't even have to lead the meeting, you can just come and give your ideas and make it happen! How many of you recycle at home? Alot, How many of you have bought those new fangled light bulbs? Alot, How many of you care about the kinds of products you clean with? How many of you make sure you look at ways to conserve on your energy bills lighting and heating? Alot.**

**You know what you can be part of the green team at church, help us be better. Do you know how many people have volunteered to be on the green team so far? 5. 5 out of a five hundred. 1%. I'll leave it at that. 1%. Grain of sand in an oyster. Maybe so.**

**Challenge, invitation to do something.**

**Creative tension.**

**We're talking a little later today in a meeting about changing the service times. We think we can get more people to come to this service if it was at 8:00. But if we do that, it won't feel the same as it does right now. We are setting up some creative tension.**

**Everyday...Valerie and I are confronted by challenges for the church. How do we get you all to volunteer to use your talents in the church? How do we help you and us to move toward wholeness?**

**Sometimes we disagree. It's a challenge.**

**How do we challenge each other to do better and to appreciate where we are right now.**

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**The push to be bigger and better is always going on...the conference is trying new programs...to be better than we are as missional leaders, to lead the churches into the next phase of who we are. But there is always the pull of the organization to sit back and not do anything.**

**The tension lies in between. Push too hard, people get recalcitrant, dig in their heels, don't move. Don't push enough...nothing moves nothing changes, people get stale, bored, tired. Finding just the right amount of creative tension....that's what we do.**

**The creative tension that we feel at church is to know God better, to grow in faith, to act on what we are hearing and learning. A young man said, "It's like exercise — I know I need it, I know it's good for me, but I also know I won't do it regularly unless someone keeps after me."**

**We promise to keep after you. Amen.**

**We give thanks for the lessons of Jesus, the way he called us out and onward. And we remember what he said at the beginning of his sermon on the mount, blessed are those who are hungry and thirst for what is right.**

**May we go with some creative tensions in our hearts. Amen.**