

SERMON: K-I-S-S

TEXT: 2 Kings 5:1-14

When I titled this sermon, KISS, I was not thinking romantically of the meeting of lips with another person. I was not thinking of the peck on the cheek as an international greeting or a gesture of affection. And I was definitely not thinking of the hard rock band in heavy black and white makeup of the 1970's and 80's.

KISS is an acronym that stands for "keep it simple stupid." You may have heard it before. This term was actually coined in the 1960's by an engineer working on an advanced aircraft development program. The engineer had a long career of designing systems with simple repair capabilities, using tools and skills used by average mechanics. The KISS principle is a design rule that states that systems perform best when they have simple designs rather than complex ones. Although the word "stupid" is part of the acronym, KISS is not meant to imply stupidity. On the contrary, it is usually associated with intelligent systems that may be misconstrued as stupid because of their simplistic design.

KISS is also an acronym for "keep it short and simple" and "keep it simple and straightforward." I have a friend who often operates by this principle. Though she would be averse to the acronym because she doesn't like the word "stupid," she often used the phrase, "explain it to me like I'm a four-year-old."

Furthermore, when I used to do the children's sermon at the churches I served previously, I sometimes had adults tell me afterwards that the message for the children helped them understand the sermon for adults.

Of course, many of the most popular churches today are the ones that have state-of-the-art sound systems with a full band of professional musicians, big screens for viewing the liturgy as well as song lyrics and even movie clips, dramatic presentations of Bible stories including trained actors, live animals, dance numbers, and on and on. And you can enjoy it all while you drink your Starbucks and eat fresh bagels.

Now, the Bible is full of dramatic stories and God certainly has been known to do big things in big ways. God spoke to Moses through a burning bush and later allowed him to part the Red Sea in order for the Hebrews to escape Egypt. The plagues against Egypt included locusts and frogs and a bloody river. Elijah was

taken up to heaven in a whirlwind while chariots of fire appeared in the sky; and little David killed the giant Goliath with a stone. God works in magnificent and mysterious ways.

Our Old Testament lesson for today, however, shows us that God often operates by the KISS principle. Naaman was a servant to the King of Aram who suffered from leprosy. Wanting to see him healed, Naaman's servant girl suggested to him that he visit the prophet Elisha for help. So, with the King's permission, he went. And Elisha instructed Naaman to simply wash in the Jordan River seven times and he would be cured.

But Naaman was furious at these instructions. Why? He was an important person, and he expected God's action to be much more dramatic. Naaman perhaps wanted God to miraculously wave his hand over the spot and cure the leprosy. Naaman seemed to want the magnificence of God's power to shine through this healing, and washing in the river seemed less than magnificent.

One theologian called the cure prescribed for Naaman "embarrassingly simple." "His pride is wounded by the low-key, if not outright rude, reception he receives from Elisha. The prophet does not even come to meet with him directly,

but sends a messenger. Naaman clearly had preconceptions about how the miracle would be performed and feels somewhat insulted that the prophet did not make a big production out of calling on YHWH.” (Kathleen A. Robertson Farmer, *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Vol. 3)

Just when we're expecting some dramatic, miraculous show, God chooses a simple act. Just when you expect God's power to be manifest in a great wind, or in an earthquake, or in a fire, it is then that God speaks in a still, small voice.

From the Gospel of Luke we learned of the seventy men who were appointed by Jesus to prepare his way and make him known in the surrounding cities and towns. Don't you imagine that they were expecting to be given some words of wisdom, some tools, perhaps even some weapons to use in their work? Especially since Jesus told them they would be "like lambs in the midst of wolves." Instead, Jesus' instructions were that they "carry no purse, no bag, no sandals."

Sometimes we think we have to be full of gifts and knowledge and resources and special expertise in order to be called to do God's work. But more often than

not God calls ordinary, simple people to serve. And you don't need to carry a lot of extra "stuff" to do it. You just need to be you.

I heard a true story once about a young boy who was mentally challenged. He was a very happy child, he loved to talk to people, and he smiled all the time. The church he attended with his parents was looking for someone who could greet people at the door each Sunday morning, and they had a variety of people to choose from: business people, the clerk of Session, a local salesperson, and a number of socialites – all people who had the gift of gab and who were known for their social graces. But they didn't choose any of these. The church chose the young mentally challenged boy for their Sunday morning greeter because he had the natural, simple gift of a smile.

Education and knowledge and talent are great gifts, and we need to use our gifts to the fullest, of course. But when we start competing and trying to do things bigger and better is when our lives become more like a show and less like a genuine act of service to God.

Just as God can accomplish big and miraculous things in very simple ways, we too can do a lot with a little. No matter what our age or our limitations (real or

perceived) we can all do great and important acts in service to God and God's people. Your smile in greeting people at the door may be just what they needed that day. The cookies you bring to a funeral luncheon is a way to minister to a grieving family. There are people who say that they don't like visiting hospitals or nursing homes because they don't know what to say. But it is the visit that is important. Your presence will be remembered more than your words. Giving someone a warm hug or a squeeze of the hand is also a way to say you care without having to say a word. Sometimes even a fresh, uneducated look at the Bible is just what a Bible Study needs to liven it up for those who've been studying it for years.

Sometimes simplicity is best. One of my favorite readings is an excerpt from Robert Fulghum's book, *All I Ever Really Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*. I'm sure you've heard it before, but this is one that deserves to be heard over and over again.

Most of what I really need to know about how to live, and what to do and how to be, I learned in kindergarten. Wisdom was not at the top of the graduate school mountain, but there in the sandbox at nursery school. These are the things I learned: Share everything. Play fair. Don't hit people. Put things back where

*you found them. Clean up your own mess. Don't take things that aren't yours.
Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody. Wash your hands before you eat.
Flush. Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you. Live a balanced life. Learn
some and think some and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work
every day some. Think of what a better world it would be if we all – the whole
world – had cookies and milk about 3 o'clock every afternoon and then lay down
with our blankets for a nap. Or if we had a basic policy in our nation and other
nations to always put things back where we found them and cleaned up our own
messes. And it is still true, no matter how old you are, when you go out into the
world, it is best to hold hands and stick together.*

Hold hands and stick together. KEEP IT SIMPLE AND
STRAIGHTFORWARD... to the glory of God!

AMEN.