

I KNOW WHO YOU ARE

Living Out of Life's Most Lavish Love

Remarkable Relationships (Part 7)

Text: Luke 15:11-24; 1 John 3:1-10; 1 Cor 13:8-13

The Story of Solomon & Dia

There is a scene in the movie, *Blood Diamond*, which helps us to understand the message of our scripture today and why it is crucial to building even more remarkable relationships with the people round about us. For those who may not have seen the film, *Blood Diamond* is set amidst the brutal civil war which ravaged the West African nation of Sierra Leone in 1999. One of the great horrors of that time was its effect on children. War-lords of that period routinely kidnapped little boys from their homes and transformed them into conscience-less killers or slave-workers in the mines that produced what we now call "conflict diamonds."

In the film, one of these stolen and disfigured children is a boy named Dia (played by Kagiso Kuypers). Dia is now a teenager and a brain-washed soldier. In the climactic scene, a diamond smuggler named Danny (played by Leonardo DiCaprio) and a local Mende fisherman named Solomon have just discovered a priceless pink diamond. Dia comes upon them just as they are digging the diamond up and, recognizing what this huge diamond will mean to his masters, Dia turns his gun toward Danny and prepares to fire.

It is then that the fisherman, Solomon (portrayed by Djimon Hounsou), looks up. Gazing deep into the cold eyes of this young killer, Solomon recognizes the fading flicker of his long-lost son. "*Dia*," he says. "*What are you doing?*" The boy turns the gun now on Solomon, suddenly looking confused. "*Look at me. What are you doing?*" repeats Solomon. "*You are Dia Vandy. Of the proud Mende tribe. You are a good boy who loves soccer and school.*" Solomon walks closer now to Dia. "*Your mother loves you so much. She waits by the fire making plantains and red palm oil stew with your sister N'Yanda and the new baby.*" Tears stream down the father's cheeks. "*The cows wait for you [as does] Babu, the wild dog, who minds no one but you.*" Tears now flow from Dia's eyes, as Solomon continues: "*I know they made you do bad things, but you are not a bad boy. I am your father, who loves you. And you will come home with me and be my son again.*" And Dia puts the gun down, as the father takes in his arms -- his child.¹

Our Place in the Story

Do you recognize this story? I hope you do. It's the same story Jesus told in Luke 15. THIS story is OUR story. Every person with whom you live or work, pass by in your school, in church, or on the street, all of us are like Dia. We have all been taken from that one true home that was life with God and his family, in the beginning, and we have

had our wills bent to serve powers that care little for us. Forgetting our origins, we are progressively trained to chase after those shiny rewards on which this world's masters have placed a ridiculous value.

Desperate in our insecurity, we learn to jockey for rank and position, trying to be heard, trying to prove ourselves worthy, and growing increasingly mistrustful and hardened toward the people around us. Most of the time, we don't even recognize how stupid or savage are the things we say and do to each other, because everyone else is doing the same. We can always name someone who is even harder or more hurtful than we are. But we are all *victims* and all *perpetrators* in the same civil war. That war now rages in every land. As you must seek, it is getting terrifyingly heated here in THIS land.

And then for some of us, as for Dia, a *familiar* but nearly *forgotten* Voice finally penetrates the madness. Like a shadow at first, and then like the glorious Goodness he is, God comes to us, helping us to remember who and Whose we truly are. And we realize that we *can* come home. We see that the Father's love is larger than all our lacks, his forgiveness greater than all our failures, his capacity to restore us vastly more powerful than anything the world or we have done to ruin us. We finally understand that we are truly *welcome* in the Father's arms – not because of how good and beautiful we are, but because of how good and beautiful God is. In the words of St. John, we see **"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! [For] that is what we are!"** (1 John 3:1).

Is that what YOU are? For seven weeks now, we've been thinking and talking a lot about who and what we are in our relationships with other people. But it is this relationship with our heavenly Father that is truly the most *remarkable* relationship of all. All the practical suggestions I and others have made over this series will just be *techniques* without the inward *transformation* that God alone makes possible. I've found, for myself -- that it is only as the life and love of the Father himself fills me up that I've been able to make significant changes in the nature of my other relationships.

This is why I'd be failing in love if I did not dare to ask every one of you: *Have you come home to God?* I don't mean have you ever heard or thought of God, or considered yourself his child in the sense that everybody was made by him. I mean, is it YOU toward whom God is looking especially intently today with a look of recognition and hope? Is it to you that he is saying: *"I am your Father, who loves YOU with a lavish love, Dia. YOU are the lost diamond for whom I have been searching. YOU are the treasure I want to clean and polish and truly LIFT up. Come home with me and be my child again."*

What do you say to this invitation? I pray that your answer is simply this: *"YES, Father."* For if it is, then you can know today with absolute assurance that you now are, in the deepest and most significant sense, "a child of God" in a way that will make a transforming difference. Please speak with me or one of the other pastors after the service today, or drop a note in the chat, or call us this week. If you have come home

to God today, then we'd love to personally welcome you to this family and point you to some helpful next steps on the path ahead.

When Our Eyes Are Opened Fully

In our scripture text for today, the Apostle John says that God's ultimate intention is to so transform his children's character that they see and love others with that **"pure"** kind of love with which **"he is pure."** Because this purification is slow and difficult, some people are going to look at you and me and conclude that being a child of God makes no real difference. But **"the reason that the world does not know us is that it [does] not know him,"** says John. The world doesn't know what God has planned for his children. **"Now we are children of God,"** writes John, **"and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears"** -- when Christ comes again and we stand before Him -- **"we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."**

In this life, most of us only glimpse God. As St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13, **"Now we see but a poor reflection [of him,] as in a mirror."** On that final day, however, God's children will get to **"see [him] face to face"** (1 Cor 13:12). We will look so deeply into the absolute goodness and beauty of the Father that, in the twinkling of an eye, we shall all be fully and finally changed. **"We shall be like him,"** whose **"greatest"** attribute **"is love."** You and I will be as lavishly loving as God himself is. We will see and treat people, just as the Father does. And, sometimes, someone starts do that, even now.

While traveling through rural Tennessee, Fred Craddock, a celebrated professor of preaching at Emory University, stopped at a diner. An old man ambled up to Craddock's table and, upon discovering that he was a preacher, sat down uninvited and began to tell his story. It turns out that the old geezer had grown up as an illegitimate child in a small town. He never met his father or even knew his name and in the old south of that time, such uncertain parentage made him the object of much rejection and scorn.

One day, the boy overheard talk that a famous evangelist had come to lead a series of revival meetings at the local church. Although the boy knew better than to venture blithely into the circle of respectable folks, curiosity finally got the best of him. On the first night of the revival, the boy crept unnoticed into the back row of the church a few minutes after the service began. He snuck out again during the singing of the last hymn.

Well, the preacher's message about a God who so loved even the unlovable that he gave up his life for them, was like honey to this boy; and so he began to come night after night -- always following the same pattern -- arriving late, sneaking out early. One particular evening, the boy was so deeply moved that he forgot to leave during the last hymn. Suddenly, people had poured out into the aisle blocking his escape. Pretending to be having a coughing fit, the boy pushed his way through the crowd toward the exit, desperate that he not be recognized.

He had just reached the door when the weight of a hand dropped onto his shoulder from behind. For a moment the warm touch felt strangely welcome, until it began to slowly spin him around and, to his horror, he looked up into the eyes of none other than the preacher himself. *"Wait just a minute,"* said the man, *"Don't I know you? I think I know your family."* The boy's heart rose to his throat in agony as he realized the preacher's error and the humiliation to come when the error was discovered. "No, I don't think so sir," said the boy meekly. *"Yes, I'm sure of it, now"* continued the preacher. *"I can see the family resemblance. I know your Father. Why you're... you're... GOD's child, aren't you? Yes, you are. And I can see you're going to become a lot like him."*

"Mister Craddock," said the old man in the diner, as he wiped the tears from his eyes, *"You have no idea what a difference those words have made."* And, with that, the elderly man tucked his newspaper under his arm, got up, and left the diner. The waitress, who had been hanging back while the men talked, now came over to Craddock's table. *"Sir, I couldn't help but notice you talking to that old man. Did he, by chance, tell you who he was?"* Craddock, still reeling from the old guy's story, shook his head blankly. *"Why that was Ben Hooper,"* said the waitress, *"two times Governor of the State of Tennessee."*

I want to thank you for coming to this revival tent today. As you leave this place and go out into this wild world this week, you are going to meet all kinds of people. You'll meet the young and the old, the put-together and the falling apart. You'll run into the angry and the sad, the fast and the slow, the easy-to-like and the very hard-to-love. They'll be in your home or neighborhood. They'll be on the train, in your workplace, or behind the counter.

Be gentle and kind with all of them, for as Scripture observes and Plato concurs: "Everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle" (Eph 6:12). They are caught up in the great civil and spiritual war that rages in every corner of our world. If the Bible is right – and I believe it is – then one day you will see these people fully through the eyes of a pure and lavish love. You will know surely then that they did not need what too many thought they did to get better. They did not need more shame and humiliation, more crushing demands and crazy expectations, more reasons to return to the cruel masters they've been serving for too long.

What people need right now is a truly REMARKABLE love. They need someone who remembers the home from which they came and helps them find their way back. They need someone far less concerned with the dust-ball they may have been than with the diamond they might have become. They need someone who says to them: "I know who you are, because I know Whose we are! Fellow children of God, our heavenly Father, why not love like this starting now?

¹ *Blood Diamond* (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2006), DVD scene 28: "I Am Your Father"; 01:56:00–01:58:35