Evangelism
"I See Dead People"
Armbrust Wesleyan Church

Sermon Date: September 5th, 2010
Title: "I See Dead People"
Passage: Matthew 8:15-13; John 11:35
Purpose: To encourage believers to carry a burden for those who are lost and to bring them to Jesus.
Theme: As Christians we see 'dead' people all the time; the question is, what should we do about it?

Optional Movie Clip: “The Sixth Sense” (Barry Mendel Productions 1999) -- Clip 48 minutes, 20 seconds

  Cole: I see dead people


  Cole: Walking around like regular people. They don’t see each other. They only see what they want to see. They don’t know they’re dead.

  Malcolm: How often do you see them?

  Cole: All the time.

Transitional Statement:

Many of you have seen this movie and know what’s taking place here in this statement. But for the sake of those of us who have not seen the The Sixth Sense, allow me to briefly review:

The Sixth Sense is about a child psychiatrist named Malcolm Crowe who is confronted one night by his former patient Vincent Gray who he failed to help. After Vincent shoots Crowe in the stomach and kills himself, Crowe can’t stop thinking about it. A few months later he is hired to help a troubled boy named Cole Sear, who has many of the same problems Vincent had. Crowe sees a chance to redeem himself, but doubts his ability to reach the boy, particularly when Cole claims to see ghosts who don’t know they’re dead.

In the scene, we realize that Cole is in a very tortured state of being. He can actually see dead people. The interesting thing, if you watch the whole movie, is that after being terrified by this, Cole becomes motivated to use his gift to help the deceased.

Now I know that some of you are thinking to yourselves, “I can’t believe he just played that video clip in church!” Others are wondering, “How in the world does this apply to reality?” “I’m sure there are a number of you are are, for the sake of sheer curiosity, wonder where I’m going with this. Well, here it is...

We all share the gift of Cole Sear.

  We see dead people...
  Walking around like regular people...
  They only see what they want to see...
  They don’t know they’re dead.
The reality is there are dead people all around us. Scripture teaches us:

“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient” (Ephesians 2:1, NIV).

Do you see it? Everyone apart from Christ is, in fact, the walking dead. They are walking around like everyone else. But they only see what they want to see. And they don’t know they’re dead.

And that’s a scary things, at time, for us who are in Christ. We don’t know what to do about this terrifying gift that God has given us to see them and know they are dead, even when they don’t.

If there is one example we can look to of a person who had a great affinity for the walking dead, it was Christ. No one human being in all of history has carried a burden for those who were spiritually dead like Jesus. And not just for people like him. He carried it for all people. He carried a burden for the Samaritan woman at the well. He carried it for the adulterer who was thrown at his feet by the religious leaders. He carried it for those who crucified him when he called out, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they are doing.”

In fact, two of the few times we see throughout the Gospels that Jesus wept, it was directly related to the spiritual deadness of those around him.

In John 11:35, the shortest verse in the Bible, we read that “Jesus wept” in the context of the death of his good friend Lazarus. But a closer investigation into the passage reveals that he wasn't concerned so much about Lazarus being in the tomb; rather it was the walking dead around him that brought tears to his eyes.

Look at the passage leading up to Jesus weeping:

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.”

When he heard this, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it.” Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days (John 11:1-6, NIV).

Now think about those words: “This sickness will NOT end in death”. “He STAYED where he was two more days”. He prolonged his return to Bethany. And check out verse 11.

After he had said this, he went on to tell them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen ASLEEP; but I am going there to WAKE HIM UP” (John 11:11, NIV).

Think about what he’s saying here. All indications that Jesus is giving is that Lazarus, though he may be sick, is not going to be dead come the end of this adventure. Now Jesus, of course was speaking of death and his disciples thought he was literal sleep, so Jesus had to tell them plainly,

“Lazarus is dead” (John 11:14, NIV).

But then he adds something very strange...

“And for you sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe” (John 11:15, NIV).
Again, very strange words. Words indicating that he was confident that outcome was not going to be a grave. And it wasn’t just his words to the disciples. After they finally returned to Bethany and Martha and Mary are giving Jesus an earful for not getting their sooner. Listen to what he tells Martha:

“Your brother will rise again” (John 11:23, NIV)

Pretty plain. But people around Jesus were never really sure how to interpret what Jesus was saying. “Is he speaking literally or figuratively... I don’t know?” (And we sometimes struggle with that today, as well.) Martha responded,

“I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day” (John 11:24, NIV)

Jesus responded,

“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die” (John 11:25-26, NIV)

And then Jesus asked her if she believed what he was saying. Martha’s response was a bit surprising and not directly to the point, but I think it appropriated displays the message that John wanted the readers of his book to see. Martha makes a messianic proclamation:

“I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was come into the world” (John 11:27, NIV)

And then comes Mary with the same accusing, yet mournful tone,

“If you had been here my brother would not have died” (John 11:32, NIV)

And there were people around Mary at this point. All of them were weeping and wailing. These people were not likely family members and friends, at least not most of them. The were pretty much hired help, paid to be there to mourn with the family. They were there because it was their job or because they had to be. And looking at all of these people, and especially his disciples, Martha and her sister Mary, the text says that Jesus

...was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. “Where have you laid him?” he asked (John 11:33-34, NIV)

Then... Jesus wept. And as they were walking to the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus overheard some of the Jews conversing among themselves,

“Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying” (John 11:37, NIV)

Once again, for the second time the text says that Jesus was

“Deeply moved” (John 11:38, NIV)

And then there is the great miracle of the raising of Lazarus from the dead. But the marvel of this story is in the background. You don’t even catch it unless you’re paying attention. Studying the passage here shows me that Jesus was indeed weeping over the dead, but it was not the man in the tomb that brought tears to his eyes. It was the spiritually dead who were all around him. Surrounding Jesus were three groups of people: the disciples, his friends Mary and Martha, and other Jews. And of these three groups of people, they fall into two categories:

First, those who proclaimed him to be Christ, but had little faith in him (i.e. the disciples, Martha and Mary)
Second, those who had no relationship to him at all (i.e. the hired mourners).
Jesus’ eyes were open and saw the walking dead around him. Jesus heart was open to them and he desired deeply and passionate to help them. That’s why we came to Earth in the first place. The heart of God was so broken by the death that was wrought by sin that he find a way to reconcile humanity to himself. Thus Jesus.

What does the term “Christian” mean to you? The term literally means “little Christ”. So let me ask you pointedly this morning. As a little Christ, do you share the burden of Christ for the walking dead? When was the last time you wept because someone or many people around you are spiritually dead in their sins, separated from God? When have you carried such a burden?

And if you have, what did you do with that burden? I can tell you this with absolute certainty: Jesus didn’t stand there on the hillside and cry over the lack of faith of his friends. Jesus was not only “moved in spirit” but he was “moved to action”. He saw the spiritual need, and he did something about it -- he raised Lazarus from the dead so that...

Many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him (John 11:45, NIV)

Now, I’m not expecting any of us to head down to the morgue of the local hospitals and start bringing dead people back to life so that many will come to faith in Jesus. I believe it’s possible and, to the glory of God, bringing life to dead bodies can does happen. But it’s certainly not the norm.

I stand here this morning and tell you that you can sympathize with the walking dead, you can empathize with the walking dead, but if you have now compassion-moved-to-action your not a “little-Christ”.

It is a scary thing, I know. Think about the movie clip we watched earlier. You could see the fear in little Cole’s eyes. But if you were to watch the rest of the movie, you would see that even though he was never comfortable helping dead people, he did come to a place where he helped them willingly.

Let’s get practical. How do we help the spiritually dead?

In Matthew chapter 8, Jesus and his little band of followers had made their way down the hill and were arriving in Capernaum discussing some of the more radical concepts that Jesus had talked about earlier that morning. What had he meant when he said this? Did he really mean it when he said that? And Jesus just smiled as he listened to them processing and debating all that he had told them about the Kingdom of God.

And then they froze, coming toward them was a group of Roman Soldiers, and all too often when the occupiers came out to meet those who were occupied it could only mean trouble. You know that sinking feeling you get when you crest a hill on the highway and there is a cruiser parked in the median? Even if you weren’t speeding, and I’m assuming that none of us here would be speeding, you automatically take your foot off the gas and pray that you weren’t inadvertently speeding.

That’s not a new feeling, and I’m sure as the soldiers got closer the guys were asking themselves if it was it something they said? Something they had done? Maybe if they just ignored the soldiers they would pass by and not bother them.

But no such luck, the military men were heading right for them, obviously with a purpose of some kind that needed to be played out. But it wasn’t anything like they expected, the man in charge stepped up to them but instead of having the belligerent attitude that they were so accustomed to seeing in their occupiers the man’s face was pleading not commanding.

And as he came to Jesus the story came out: apparently the man’s servant was extremely ill and suffering but it’s interesting to note here that he did not come requesting that Jesus heal his servant, as a matter of fact he makes no request at all, he just tells Jesus what’s wrong. Matthew 8:6
“Lord, my young servant lies in bed, paralyzed and in terrible pain.”

That's it, doesn't offer Jesus any suggestions on what he should do. Doesn't make any demands, or any requests, instead he just tells him what the problem is. We could probably learn a lot from that one observation.

We don't know what he expected Jesus to do, or if he expected Jesus to do anything. Maybe he was just looking for some sympathy or for some assurance that God was in control and that everything would work out. Instead if we continue along in our story Jesus responds by saying Matthew 8:7 Jesus said,

“I will come and heal him.”

Sounds reasonable. The man was sick and Jesus was obviously able to do something and so he offered to do what he could. Now that might not seem like a big deal to us but it was actually enormous. As we progress in the story we discover that the man wasn't a Jew, he was a gentile which meant that according to Jewish law there would be certain restrictions on any interactions that Jesus might have with him. Under Jewish law Jesus would have been forbidden to enter the home of a gentile.

And yet there was no hesitation in Jesus at all. If your servant is sick then let's go and take care of it. Seems simple enough. But the Soldier responds by saying Matthew 8:8-10

But the officer said, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come into my home. Just say the word from where you are, and my servant will be healed. I know this because I am under the authority of my superior officers, and I have authority over my soldiers. I only need to say, ‘Go,’ and they go, or ‘Come,’ and they come. And if I say to my slaves, ‘Do this,’ they do it.”

Wow, gotta love that. Matthew 8:10

When Jesus heard this, he was amazed.

And his comments about the faith of the Roman soldier opens the door of the Kingdom of God to not only the Jews but also to Gentiles, that would be us. And as a bonus we read in Matthew 8:13

Then Jesus said to the Roman officer, “Go back home. Because you believed, it has happened.” And the young servant was healed that same hour.

This Roman Soldier, who more rightly would be referred to as a Roman Centurion because he would have been a long-serving member of the Roman army who was in charge of 1000 men.

The interesting thing here though is wrapped up in the man's request. He isn't here asking about his spouse or his child or even one of his men. Those things would be understandable. Instead he comes on behalf of his servant, or more accurately his slave. Remember 2000 years ago a slave wasn't a person, they were property. Yet here was a Centurion coming to a Jewish teacher about his personal attendant.

This Centurion saw a man in his life who was dying and was in need of help, and he knew that Jesus could do something about it.

Here's a couple of things I picked up on, practically speaking, that might help us move our burden to action.
1. Know Your Responsibility

At some point the soldier realized that if his servant was going to be helped it would be Jesus that did it. Maybe he had exhausted all other avenues. Perhaps he had already been to doctors and they had been unable to help. We don’t know what had transpired in the story before Jesus was approached, and really it is irrelevant. Whatever led the soldier to Jesus and however long it took for him to get there, he ended up in the right place.

Maybe he had heard stories of the preacher from Galilee who had such incredible powers, or perhaps he had been on the edge of the crowds that had gathered around Christ and listened to his teaching. We don’t know, but we do know that he was here, and he knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus was the answer.

Application:

We need to recognize that people who don’t know Jesus have to know Jesus. It’s not just a good idea, it isn’t an option that they can add to their lives to make it a little better. We have to come to the inescapable conclusion that there is a heaven to be gained and a hell to be shunned. We need to realize that Jesus is exactly who he said he was in John 14:6 when he told Thomas,

“I am the way, the truth and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.”

And until we accept the Gospel as the Gospel Truth we will never feel the compulsion to do as the apostle Andrew did in John 1:42-43

Andrew went to find his brother, Simon, and told him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means “Christ”). Then Andrew brought Simon to meet Jesus.

As long as we can convince ourselves that maybe they will be alright if they are good enough and kind enough and sincere enough, then we will never tell them that we have found the Messiah.

Thom Ranier in his book *The Unchurched Next Door* interviewed several hundred people in both the US and Canada who do not attend church, they are unchurched people. Here is part of what Rainer discovered:

Statistics:

“Are Christians inviting non-Christians to church? The heartbreaking answer is no. Only 21 percent of active churchgoers invite anyone to church in the course of a year. But only 2 percent of church members invited an unchurched person to church.” Think about it: out of a hundred active churchgoers 21 of them will invite someone to church. But 19 of those people who were invited to church already attend church somewhere else.”

If you had only been saved to go to heaven, then Jesus would have taken you to heaven at that very minute. But you are to take as many people as possible with you.

There are many ways we can connect people to Jesus:

1. **We can sit them down and show them through the Roman Road** (Romans 3:23, 6:23, 10:9-10), pointing out to them that they are indeed a sinner, as we all are, in need of a Savior.

2. **We can do something as simple as inviting them to church.**

Statistics:

If we go back to Thom Rainer’s book, *The Unchurched Next Door*, research tells us 82 Percent of the unchurched are at least “somewhat likely” to attend church if they are invited. Perhaps we need to pause here to allow that to sink in, maybe we need to restate it 82 Percent of the unchurched are at least “somewhat likely” to attend church if they are invited. If you don’t remember anything else from this message hang on to that: 8 out of 10 of your friends and co-workers would be at least somewhat likely to attend church if you invited them.
3. **Be a “front-porch-neighbor”**. You remember those good-ol’ days when people used to sit out on their porch and talk to everyone who walked by, weather they new them or not. And how about on the other end. If you’re out walking around town, try not walking with your head to the ground, avoiding all eye contact with the world around you. Take every opportunity to talk with people, learn about people, and shine the light of Christ into their lives.

**Illustration:**
Just this past week, I had an opportunity to talk to a young man in my neighborhood. Did I bring him to a place of complete surrender to God, no. Did I get a commitment out of him to come to church, no. But I know his name and I know where he lives, and I know he was having a bad day because his girlfriend of two weeks broke up with him. It’s a starting place, and I’m trusting Jesus to continue to open the doors for ministry that I can’t open myself.

2. **Know What You’re Responsible For**

Wasn’t it interesting to note that the Centurion didn’t try to tell Jesus what to do or how to fix his servant. He knew that he was powerless to affect the change that had to happen in his servant and friend.

I mean think about it, if he could have done it he would have already done it. His responsibility was to connect his servant and Jesus and he did.

**Application:**
This, if anything, should make it easier on us. All we are responsible for is to connect people to Jesus. We need not get stressed out on the details. As much as we would like to change those we love, we can’t. We can’t make them behave better, we can’t make them trust God, we can’t make them change their behavior. It just won’t happen.

**Illustration:**
Parents, if you think you can make your kids behave you are wrong. They may behave to please you, they may behave to keep you quiet and off their back, or they may behave because they want to behave, but whatever they are doing they are doing it because they have chosen to, not because “You have made them.”

And so understand we can’t fix people, we can only help connect them to Jesus. You understand that there is a difference between Christianizing people and seeing them become a Christian. We can help them exhibit the right principles. We can help them get rid of their sinful behavior. We can help them walk the way they ought to walk and talk the way they ought to talk. And that may make a difference in their life here on earth, but it will not make an eternal difference. That difference can only be made by God, and only when the person wants that difference and chooses that difference to be made.

3. **Be Willing to Pay the Price**

You are probably thinking, “Well Jesus didn’t charge him Tyler, what do you mean?” We see the Centurion strolling up to Jesus and stating his case, but it probably wasn’t that simple. The soldier may not have had to pay cash, but there was a price, and the biggest one was his pride.

At some point he had to acknowledge that he couldn’t fix what had to be fixed. Then he had to get his head around the fact that what he, as a Centurion with the might of the Roman Empire behind him, was unable to do, this simply teacher from Galilee would be able to do. Then he had to come to the place that he was willing to approach Jesus. And then what if Jesus did nothing? What if he was antagonistic toward Romans. What if he was unable to do anything?

**Application:**
We all struggle with questions like that when we want to invite someone out to church or talk to them about their personal relationship with Christ. What if they say no? What if they are antagonistic toward the church or Christ himself?

But the centurion had to get over those doubts and say, "Well nothing ventured nothing gained."

So what is an invitation? For many of the unchurched it would simply mean being asked. For others it included the offer to meet them at the front door to show them around. But in either case it goes back to a simple premise of: invite them and they will come.

And so there is a price that has to be paid.

Illustration:

And there are people who willing pay a price every week to make sure that we have the type of church you can invite your friends to. There are those who serve faithfully to make sure there is music at church. There are those who chose to sit closer to the front, so that the more desirable seats will be available for our guests. There are those who volunteer in Junior church so that your guests will be know their children are being cared for in a safe and fun environment.

Oh by the way in our case there is a financial price that has to be paid as well. Because in order for this church to exist there are bills that have be be paid to keep the lights on, and the heat running, and to maintain a safe and clean facility to meet. And it's because there are people who give sacrificially, and might I say obediently, that we have a church to invite people to. And if you fit into that category then I thank you.

But it's more than just inviting people to church. It's great if you can get a friend, co-worker, neighbor, family member to come to church, but if you're not doing your part, if you're not willing to pay the price to insure that they are meeting Jesus, then it's all for not. I cannot stress this point enough. I've said it before and I'll say it again: it's is not in the pastor's job description to be the primary agent to encourage people unto salvation... that responsibility lies in those who are in the pews -- that's you! My primary job is to equip you with the tools necessary to accomplish this God-given commission, and to lead this church in a direction where it becomes a lighthouse to the community and world. It's not the pastor's singular light that attracts people, it's the collective light of the entire body working together as well as individually -- not only in this building, but out there in the world -- that attracts people.

There is a price to be paid, and often time, like the Roman Centurion, is our pride. We don't want to he shot down. We don't want to be let down. We think we can just stay in our comfort zones and think to ourselves, "I'll just pray for them." Can I tell you something... pointedly and candidly... having a burden for the spiritually dead and praying for them... praying hard for them... crying while you pray for them ISN'T ENOUGH. You must put yourself out their... that's the only way that Jesus will be amazed (Matthew 8:10) by your burden and obedience. Jesus put himself out there for you... all the way to the cross of calvary.

Challenge:

So where are you at today? Who is there in your life that came to mind when I was speaking about connecting people with Jesus? Let's pause for a moment and think about that person or those people. Let's pray for them... but let us also put feet to our prayers.