



"The Problem Drinker: What Can We Do?"

Ephesians 5:15-20

Today is *Drug and Alcohol Concerns* in the United Methodist Church. Our church has felt there is enough concern in that area to put aside a special Sunday every year to deal with it.

We all know there are problems with alcohol and other drugs in our society. Drugs are becoming more widespread and used by many people, even in this community. It is estimated 7 out of 10 of all adults in America drink. Of these about 1 out of 10 is an alcoholic, and some of the others have a drinking problem. Alcohol is a big part of the accidents, deaths, suicides, shootings, and arrests in America. Alcohol is one of America's big problems.

The United Methodist Church, in its Social Principles, says "We affirm our long-standing support of abstinence from alcohol as a faithful witness to God's liberating and redeeming love for persons." I believe in abstaining from alcohol but I also know that most people drink and I have to work with those who abuse alcohol and other drugs.

What can we do as a Christian congregation to help people who are caught in the trap of alcoholism?

Before I answer that I want us to realize there is nothing magical about alcohol and other drugs. They do not reach up and force themselves into the bodies of the people who want them. Drugs can be used for good or evil and it is not the drugs which decide which way it will be.

We are concerned about people. Alcohol and other drugs become problems only when people become problems – problems to themselves and to others. When this happens we need to be able to help those people in need.

Jesus tells Peter in John 21 that if he loves Him, he will carry on Jesus' work of feeding His people. People need feeding, and when they are not fed spiritually they start feeding themselves destructive elements. When those people cut themselves off from others, it is our responsibility as a church of Jesus Christ to love, care for, and be concerned about that person.

I would like for us to talk about alcoholism and see what might be done to help. I am going to consider only one form of alcoholism this morning, and then talk about what we can do to help. The form I am going to talk about is described very well by the Rev. Joseph Kellerman in a pamphlet published by Al-Anon, as one that involves everyone concerned in "A Merry-Go-Round Named Denial."

If we can think of this Merry-Go-Round as a drama, we can see there are three acts which make up the play.

In the First Act, the alcoholic is *the Star*. If we choose a male lead, we find he is 30-55, smart, skillful, and often successful in his job.

The average person is sensitive, lonely, and tense. He is probably more immature than most adults though he would deny that. He hasn't made peace with who he is. He is also prone to deny that he is responsible for the results of his behavior.

He is dependent and denies he is an alcoholic, although he has learned that alcohol makes him feel better. For a few hours it floats away his troubles; it melts away his fears, reduces his tensions, removes his loneliness, and solves his problems.

He probably conceals the amount he drinks by doing much of it off stage where the other actors can't see. He denies again by hiding the amount he drinks which proves to observers that he knows it is too much. It is more than others drink, more often, and above all, far more important to him than to others.

At almost any point, *the Star* says that no one can tell him what to do; he tells them. After a few drinks, he really develops a sense of success and well-being.

He is on top of the world. He acts as if he were a little god. He tries to promise to help others and he knows he is right, no matter what.

He is basically not rational or sensible. He is a dependent person behaving as if he were dependent and often ignoring the rules of social conduct.

He eventually gets himself into a crisis and this moves us to Act II.

In Act II, the alcohol which first gave him a sense of success and independence has now stripped him of his mask and revealed him as a helpless, dependent child, though of course he would deny this. The truth is revealed in the fact that *the alcoholic in the Second Act doesn't do anything*.

When the crisis comes he waits for something to happen, ignores it, walks away from it, or cries for someone to get him out of it. And this is what happens. He expects others to do it for him, and sure enough, everything is done for him.

First of all, someone might play the role of *Rescuer*- a friend, a doctor, preacher, social worker who believes the person has suffered enough. These people contribute to the denial process by denying the alcoholic the process of learning to correct his own mistakes. That person then believes there will always be someone who will save him.

The next character to come on stage and become part of the Merry-Go-Round is *the Victim*. The employer, boss, or supervisor who is responsible for getting the work done and is hurt when the alcoholic doesn't show or doesn't function in his job. *The Victim* probably knows the alcoholic well and does not want to hurt the man or his family. He keeps the alcoholic from losing his job, bending the rules, covering up.

Without *the Victim*, the alcoholic could not function. He would have to quit drinking or lose his job.

The third character in this act is the key person- the *Spouse or Parent* of the alcoholic *Star*, the one with whom the alcoholic lives. Her role is that of provoker and patsy.

She is hurt by his drinking episodes and ends up feeding back into the relationship much bitterness, resentment, fear and hurt and becomes a source of provocation the alcoholic can respond to.

He blames her, directly or indirectly, for everything that goes wrong with the home and marriage. She, in turn, tries everything possible to make the marriage work to prove he is wrong. She works at being a wife, housekeeper, nurse and maybe even earns part of the income.

She tries to do the impossible and the guilt, resentment and bitterness keep rolling. She feels pressure from society for not being a good wife when she thinks of getting out. So no matter what he does, the alcoholic knows he will always have a home to come back to.

Act II is complete and the alcoholic continues to drink because all the other people involved have taken care of the painful results of his actions and he believes he can continue on as usual without being responsible.

In Act III the denial is intensified all around. The alcoholic denies he has a drinking problem. He continues to blame his wife for nagging and maybe even being unfaithful. Or he might not even talk about it at all- just being silent and refusing to say anything about it.

The truth is the person knows they have a problem that they are denying. He knows about his drunkenness, failure, and guilt. They become unbearable to his ego.

Then the other people involved begin to get on his case.

-- The *Rescuer* denies they will ever help again if he doesn't admit his problem and get help.

-- The *Victim* denies they will allow any more mess-ups at work.

-- The *Spouse* denies that they can live together until he gets help and changes.

But of course the name of this drama is "A Merry-Go-Round Named Denial", and the alcoholic knows that everyone is different than they were in the past.

But the alcoholic also knows the way to relieve this new pain is to drink again. And this is what he does, hoping that things will be as they once were and he can be in control again.

The play goes from the Third Act back to the First Act without ending. If everyone plays the same way then it will be a Merry-Go-Round that will be without end.

What might be done? No one can demand that the alcoholic stop drinking. We have free will. Also the alcoholic will not change by himself. The only way for things to change is for the other players in the drama to get off the Merry-Go-Round.

This will force the alcoholic to find new resources. The other players cannot direct the alcoholic's life but they can say, "I am not going to be a part of this destructive behavior which is hurting you and me."

This is not easy and that is why it seldom happens. It is what Dr. James Dobson calls "Tough Love". But it is the only way things might change and then there is no guarantee.

We cannot cover up for, protect and insulate an alcoholic. They must learn to deal with the consequences of their actions.

What can we do as a church and as concerned Christians?

First, we need to realize there are certain basic assumptions that must be made about us, alcoholics and the Christian faith.

A. The alcoholic, like all of us, is part of God's creation and therefore is good. We all have within us what it takes to be a committed Christian.

B. The alcoholic, like all of us, lives in a state of sin. He is trying to live life without God, denying his need for God. We need to feed the spiritual side of that person.

We cannot play god and say we have it made. We reach out to others and say, "There, but for the grace of God, go I."

C. The alcoholic, like the rest of us, is stuck in bondage and needs the grace of God to release him. We need to get rid of the feeling that we do not need help, that we can control life.

We need to accept each other, help each other, and realize God's love and grace is able to help us and the alcoholic.

D. The alcoholic, like us, will respond to God's love and find happiness or, reject God's love and continue on their merry-go-round.

E. Jesus asked Peter three times to feed his sheep. Earlier Jesus told Peter to forgive his brother 70 times 70. As members of the body of Christ we must not give up in our efforts to help feed ourselves and those in need-- like the alcoholic.

Secondly, we need to be educated about alcoholism and other drug abuse. We have literature on the table in the foyer. Know what is happening.

We need to study God's Word and see what it says about the abuse of our bodies through alcohol and other drugs.

Whatever your attitude is toward drinking, you should be educated about the problem. We need to help other people, not just condemn them.

We need to continue to communicate with our young people and help them to see there are alternatives to the abuse of alcohol and other drugs. You do not have to drink and use drugs to be accepted.

Thirdly, we can be involved in the community. In this community we are trying to help the junior high youth to gain enough self-respect and confidence to say no to those who abuse alcohol and other drugs.

We need to support community groups like AA and Al-Anon. We need to be supportive of the Unified Health Services.

We are called by Christ to enter into the world and feed those who are hungry. Sometimes that means we have to suffer as Christ suffered until that person that we have been feeding finds a rebirth in a new life in Christ..

Maybe one day we will be able to help others see this is a great world that God has created and that we do not have to deny ourselves the happiness God offers all people.

Let us pray.