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**“Trading Places”
A sermon by Marilyn T. Hedgpeth
29th Sunday in Ordinary Time: Children’s Sabbath
October 21, 2012
2 Corinthians 8:7–9; Hebrews 5:1–10**

Scripture Reading: 2 Corinthians 8:7–9

Trading Places: The Prince and the Pauper

I want to tell you a story that was written by a famous American author named Samuel Clemens. You may know him by his pen name, Mark Twain. And my two friends, Alex and Jackson, are going to help me with the story.

Once upon a time there were two young boys who lived in London.

One of them is a poor boy named Tom, who lives in an awful part of town with his twin sisters, their mother, who is a beggar, and their father, who is a thief.

Tom spends his days in dirty, run-down places, running through the streets, jumping in mud puddles, and swimming in nearby streams.

The other boy is a very wealthy boy named Edward, who just happens to be Prince Edward, the son of King Henry VIII of England and Jane Seymour.

Prince Edward spends his life in the palace courts, in the lap of luxury, with a very strict routine of diet, exercise, education, and royal protocol.

Neither boy is totally happy with his life and wishes that things could be different.

One day the two boys happen to bump into each other just outside the palace gates.

The palace guards push the street boy, Tom, away from the prince,

but the prince protests this unfavorable treatment

and invites Tom inside the palace

where they have an honest one-on-one conversation.

The young prince finds that he is envious of the poor boy's life of freedom:

the playing of street games with various children and the swimming in the streams,

and he realizes how restricted his life has been.

The poor boy, Tom, finds that he is, likewise, envious of the prince's life of ease:

his beautiful clothing and the security of having all of his needs provided for him.

And when the two boys look at each other very carefully, up and down, front and back,

they discover that they are about the same height,

they have about the same color of hair and eyes,

their hands are exactly the same size,

they move in very similar ways,

and they look so much alike that they might as well be twins!

So they decide to trade places,

just for a day, to see what the other's life is really like.

Prince Edward takes off his royal robes and crown and puts on Tom's ragged play clothes,

and young Tom takes off his play clothes and puts on

the prince's royal robes and crown.

And when their exchange is finished, Prince Edward leaves the palace disguised

as a poor boy, and Tom stays in the palace, disguised as a prince.

Do you think their trick will work?

Well, it does work for a while.

Prince Edward, now dressed in rags, wanders the streets of London,

and he becomes quite upset about the state of things that he sees.

He runs into Tom's father, the thief, who thinks he is Tom gone crazy,

and treats him very badly, dragging him back home by the scruff of his collar.

The other boy, now dressed in royal robes, wanders through the palace courts,
and he becomes quite upset and angry about the corruption he sees in the palace.
His father, King Henry VIII, who is very sick at this time,
also thinks his son is crazy because he is acting so strangely.
However, because the King's health is so poor, he orders preparations to begin
to crown his son King, should he be unable to continue to serve.

Well, moving ahead, just as the coronation is about to take place,
Tom, who is about to be wrongly crowned,
sees his mother and sisters out in the crowd and wants to be back home
with his real family.

And Edward, who still looks like a poor boy, finally convinces the royal court
that he is the real prince and manages to trade places again with Tom.
So, Edward puts on his own robe and crown once more and is crowned King of England.
And Tom puts on his street clothes once more and is reunited with his mother
and sisters.

So, happy ending, right? But both boys learned something important in the exchange.
Tom learns how difficult and lonely it is to be leader of a whole country
composed of many different types of people.

And Edward learns how to be a better ruler, a better King,
and to have compassion for all the people in his country,
especially for the poor and underserved.

Do you ever wonder what God learned about us by sending Jesus into the world
as a poor carpenter's son?

Do you ever wonder what we have learned about meeting God in the flesh as Jesus?

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 5: 1-10

Trading Places: Am I My Doppelganger's Keeper?

Doppelganger... is one of my favorite German words
that has crossed over into English vernacular.

It can mean a double—someone who looks like you, like your stunt double,
if you are an actor or actress.

Or it can mean your alter ego—someone who is your second self, who acts like you,
or sometimes someone who acts the opposite of you.

Or it can imply someone who is nothing like you at all, but who shares the same name
with you.

So, I want to tell you a true story about a young man, an author,

who has written a book about his experience of encountering his doppelganger.

The young man's name is Wes Moore, and his doppelganger's name is also Wes Moore.

Both of them are African-American males who grew up
on the tough, gritty streets of west Baltimore.

Both were raised, along with their siblings, by single moms.

Both had an early history of trouble in school and trouble with the law.

But one Wes Moore, the one who wrote the book, the one whom I have met,
hit his first patch of trouble and

was sent away to Valley Forge Military Academy and College,
graduated from there and from Johns Hopkins University,

became a Rhodes Scholar and studied international relations at Oxford University,

worked on Wall Street briefly, joined the military and fought in Afghanistan,

returned to the United States to serve as a White House fellow under Condoleezza Rice,
climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro and traveled the world,

and stood to speak before a crowded INVESCO Field in Denver, Colorado,

on the 45th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech,

just hours before Barack Obama took the same stage

and used the same microphone to accept the Democratic nomination
for President of the United States in August 2007.

One could say that this Wes Moore had a rocky start, but found his footing,
found his passion, found his support system, and made a success of himself.

This Wes Moore learned of the other Wes Moore, his doppelganger,
when his mother called him on the phone one day
as he was spending his junior year abroad in South Africa
to let him know that the Baltimore police were looking for another Wes Moore in their
old neighborhood, saying that he had killed a policeman.

The other Wes Moore, it seems, had never escaped the tough, gritty neighborhood
where they grew both up.

The other Wes Moore never managed to graduate from high school.

The other Wes Moore had four children by two different women
by the time he was 18.

The other Wes Moore made his money bringing illegal substances into the neighborhood
and marking up the price to sell them to the street corner hustlers.

The other Wes Moore tried to get help, tried to escape the gravity of the neighborhood,
found it temporarily in Job Corps, a federal program for disadvantaged youth,
but couldn't get the sustained support he needed to find work,
maintain employment, and stay off the streets.

Consequently and sadly, the other Wes Moore has spent every day of his life since 2000
in the Jessup Correction Institution in Maryland, sentenced to life in prison
after he was convicted for a jewelry store heist that resulted in the murder
of off-duty police sergeant, Bruce Prothero,
a 13-year veteran of the Baltimore County police department and father of five.

The Rhodes Scholar, Wes Moore, was haunted by the knowledge of his doppelganger,
and so he reached out to the other Wes Moore; he reached across that chasm
and began a prison correspondence with him that blossomed into his book
which is entitled *The Other Wes Moore*.

He couldn't rescue the other Wes Moore; the damage was already done.

But he could establish a relationship with him and explore ways to help
other potential Wes Moores escape the pull
of their unfortunate circumstances and choices.

What was the difference in their lives that made one child of the streets
ascend to unimagined heights
and the other child of the streets descend to the depths of life imprisonment?

The other Wes Moore, the father of four, said, "Providing for others isn't easy.

And the mistakes you make trying are pretty unforgiving... and second chances
are pretty fleeting... Both of us had second chances.

But if the situation or the context where you make the decisions doesn't change,
then second chances don't mean too much, (do they)?"

(Wes Moore. *The Other Wes Moore*, "Prelude to Part II, Choices and Second Chances")

When asked if he thought people were products of their environment,
the imprisoned Wes Moore said,

"I think so, or maybe products of our expectations... We will do what others expect of us.

If they expect us to graduate, we will graduate.

If they expect us to get a job, we will get a job.

If they expect us to go to jail, then that's where we will end up, too."

(Wes Moore, "Prelude to Part III, Paths Taken and Expectations Fulfilled")

The writer, Wes Moore, says in his book, not once, but twice:

"The chilling truth is that Wes' story could have been mine;
the tragedy is that my story could have been his."

(Wes Moore. *The Other Wes Moore*, p. 180)

The writer, Wes Moore, reached across the chasm to meet his doppelganger

and to try and understand his pain in order to save other Wes Moores that same pain.

Isn't that what God has done for us in Jesus, in loving the world?

And isn't that what Jesus calls us to do for others, in loving our neighbor?

I couldn't help but think about trading places when I read this passage from Hebrews

about Christ being appointed God's great high priest
according to the order of Melchizedek.

Melchizedek, whose name in Hebrew means King of Righteousness,
is mentioned only briefly in Genesis 14 and Psalm 110

as one of the few unblemished characters in Scripture:

an ideal advocate of peace, righteousness and justice.

The writer of Hebrews compares Christ to this ideal great high priest,
but notes especially the compassionate nature of Christ's solidarity
with those in lowly places, not those in high places.

Jesus, God's appointed great high priest in the order of Melchizedek,
could have stayed in the divine cloister, the royal sanctuary, the holy of holies,
and love us from a distance,

but he never would have understood our pain, really.

He could have stayed in the throne room;

he could have stayed in the councils on high.

He could have stayed in the inner sanctum;

he could have stayed in the royal courtyards, but he didn't.

He could have been the prince, but he came down

to become the pauper, to know the poverty of our experience.

He could have been the Rhodes Scholar rabbi, but he came down

to become a peripatetic teacher of the gritty streets

and crossroads of our coming and going,

where some people are robbed, stripped, and left half dead,

while others glibly pass them by.

He could have stayed seated at God's right hand,

in the catbird seat of eternal life, but he came down

to become one arrested, unjustly tried, and sentenced to a quick death,

to know the pain of those who spend a long, slow life in prison.

Jesus came down and became fully human, moved into the tough neighborhoods

and corrupt institutions, where real people live and move and have their being,

and offered up prayers and petitions for us

for those of us who need second and third chances;
for those of us who cannot live unblemished lives, even when we try;
for those of us who cannot escape the
 gravity of our context and our situations,
and he cried compassionate tears with us,
 and he cried redemptive tears for us that we might be saved.

He came down to make his story ours, and he came down to make our story his.

He came down to redeem the chilling tragedy of all lives not fully lived.

Have you ever tried to find or encounter your doppelganger?

I Googled other Marilyn Turners and found one who used to be a weather reporter
 in Detroit.

And sometimes I am confused for Laura Mendenhall, who used to be the
 President of Columbia Theological Seminary.

Those are my successful doppelgangers, the ones whom I am happy to claim.

But there are many others, I am sure,
 who are like me in ways that have not resulted in anything like success.

One, perhaps, is a child who never could see the blackboard and learn
 because no one bothered to have her eyesight tested or buy her glasses.

One, perhaps, is a child whose parents never expected her to finish high school
 and go on to college, who never thought she'd amount to much of anything.

For, as the other Wes Moore noted,
 we are so often products of the expectations of others.

One, perhaps, is a child who accidentally fell and broke her arm,
 but whose family does not have the insurance
 to cover orthopedic care and physical therapy, and so she will go through
 life as if she had one good arm.

One, perhaps is a 19-year-old college co-ed, a Native American,
 found dead in her apartment in Chapel Hill,
 whose last name happens to be Hedgpeth also,
 which chills my husband and myself to the bone.

Do I know them? Have I tried to find them? Am I bold enough to encounter them?

Am I my doppelganger's keeper? Am I my doppelganger's advocate?

Christ, one like the greatest high priest, the Prince of Peace,

came down, took our form, cried and prayed for our reform,

suffered and died to redeem and transform and our tragic stories into to God's greatest joys.

And he calls us and challenges us to follow him into the lowly places,

and if need be, to come down off our high horses, to trade places,

in order to discover where our greatest gifts meet the world's greatest needs. Amen.