

Something for Everyone

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In keeping with the mood of the new year we talked last week about growth. If Paul Simon can sing, “Still crazy after all these years,” then we Christians should sing, “Still growing after all these years.” This is only apropos since Christ, the Dynamic One, is in us and as we work with him even though our outward selves are breaking down, our inner selves are being renewed day by day. That’s the encouraging promise of the Bible for II Cor. 4.

I want to talk again today about growing spiritually. I am going to talk about it differently than last week. Different week, different approach but same topic. Think for a moment right now and then think for lots of moments later today about *how* you have grown and matured as a person, grown and matured spiritually. What were the circumstances? What were the elements? You may be surprised and find, for example, that hardship, and suffering in some cases, grew you.

I’ve thought of some ways I have grown. Do any of these resonate with you? People, growing through people. Books have deepened me intellectually, but it has been people who have loved and challenged me and modelled good life to me that have grown me. This much more than an essay read in some library cubicle.

I remember once botching a pretty costly job and being in anguish about it. Joyce, a secretary, took me aside and very earnestly let me know that others had made mistakes, I would make mistakes, and that everything would be completely okay. That eye-lock and heart-lock

conversation repaired me and I've been stronger ever since. A person did that.

You might think of an English teacher who said, "You really write beautifully," and that encouragement led to you become an English major and an English teacher. People grow us, wouldn't you agree?

Accomplishments also, but not the easy kind. I find myself stronger when there is something difficult for me to handle that I actually handle. Maybe it is a thorny conversation and I really want to run from it. I don't want to admit this or that. I don't want to confront this or that. But when I handle it, I find that I am a stronger person because I did. Doing something that is not challenging to me physically or psychologically isn't the same. But handling a challenge is. In a good way I find that I'm proud of myself for trying.

Practice and practices have grown me. Do something over and over. Making certain behaviors my routine. Take piano, for example. There was a weekly lesson which meant daily sitting down with the metronome and plinking note after note. Pretty soon, while at first I couldn't play, "Little Brown Jug," after a time I could. I had grown.

Classically, for Christian growth, people have experienced it through the practices of regular Bible reading, prayer, and giving. In all these there is a kind of surrender, a kind of obedience, a lean toward engagement with God. You can do these without that inner lean. Believe me, I know.

Remember we said last week, Christian growth is not instantaneous or automatic. You don't blink and it's all turn-key done. Nor do you flip a switch and sit back. It takes time and effort. But little by little we can grow.

I want to zero in today on that classical practice of giving and particularly the giving of service. Giving really means the giving of love, money, help or service, and witness. So giving of heart, goods, time, effort, and words for Christ, but today focusing on the giving of service ... for the glory of God, the good of our souls, and the benefit of the world.

The Christian life you see is a doing life. In the inaugural sermon of the NT, the inaugural sermon of Jesus, he delivers it, not ending with a whimper, but with a wallop. It is a “now once again, and in conclusion, here’s my main point,” and he goes on to say there’s a foolish man and a wise man. Both are building houses, and we best say that they are building lives, and both of them have storms. One, however, is on sand and it collapses, while the other is on rock and it stands. Both men, we are told, listen to the Word of God. There is only one difference that makes one the fool on sand with a house in shambles and the other wise on rock with a house intact. It is this: one hears the Word of God and the other hears the Word of God ... and does it. The Christian life is a doing life.

God has not saved us to be knick-knacks on the mantle of heaven for eternity. He made us in the first place and he saved us in the second place to relate in love to him and have dominion beside him, to collaboratively rule and “do stuff” with him.¹ The Christian life is a doing life.

Sometimes we look around at problems and wonder to God, “Why are these still here?” Sometimes I imagine him saying back to us, “I’m wondering the same thing. Why do you think I positioned you there? (There something he

¹ See dominion and reign in Genesis 1-2, Psalm 8 cited by Heb. 2, and II Tim 2.

wants to do through you there.)” The Christian life is a doing life.

Someone said that the church is for discipleship, that is us apprenticing ourselves to Jesus to learn how to do things with him using the resources of the kingdom of heaven. So the church is for that, discipleship, and discipleship is for the world, that is, with him we help this beautiful and needy world. The Christian life is a doing life.

Now that doing is amplified because the Christian life is a team life. Our reach is further. The tonalities of it are wider.

We read in our Wednesday BS this week about Daniel’s resolve for God in a tough situation and we remember Daniel in the story but the truth is that he forged his decision with three friends (Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego). They were strong together. The Christian life is a doing life *together*.

Physically we are born into families and spiritually we are born into families. There’s a team to be with, to nurture us, and work beside. That family or team at work is described in I Peter 4, Romans 12, I Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4. Everyone has a role, something to do.

There we discover that there is diversity with unity. That we need each other. I can’t do everything and you can’t do everything. That keeps us humble and sane.

But together we can do more than I could alone or you could alone. It’s one plus one equals three. Or one plus him, and one plus him, equals a hundredfold per the parable of the seed and soil.

All these passages are about you and I not just being blessed, not just being all blessed up with no place to go. They are about us being equipped. Requisitioned equipment, given training... so as to do. The Christian life is a doing life, a doing together life.

Do you want to grow spiritually? No one doesn't want to, really. So to grow, find something to do. Get equipped and get deployed.

I can't tell you how many times, I heard it again this week, where people say that they went out to serve and found that they received much more than they gave. God seems to wire the universe up that way. So find something to do.

As far as something to do, you may ask, what do you suggest? I'm glad you asked. I believe that we should be ambidextrous. I'd give my right arm to be ambidextrous but I'm not. By ambidextrous I mean find a way to serve people outside the church and find a way to serve people inside the church. Not either-or but both-and.

Outside the church it could be once or twice a year having your neighbors over for a pot-luck. Inside the church it could be ... well, it could be any one of twelve things or more.

Sometimes people want to know, "Pastor, is there something I could help *you* with? I've thought of twelve things that would be helpful indeed. It'd lighten my load and help you and us do better."

Sometimes I hear elders say, "I could use some help with x, y, or z." When I think of how I could respond to them, I think, "If I found someone who could do ... just one of twelve specific things, that would help them."

Would you like to grow spiritually? To help me and the elders and this church? Then see if there's something on this Twelve Tribes insert you might be able to do.

Now if I had you mark the insert and turn it in, I could end up with sixteen people cleaning the memorial garden and that'd be overkill. Meanwhile, I don't have anyone telephoning shut-ins. That's why I'm going to ask you today to sign up for something. It'd be nice if everyone was doing something and no one was doing nothing.

A small caveat. I know for some of you, just getting up and to church regularly, given your health and strength, is a monumental effort. That right there is your service. I can't tell you how many of you set an example for me of perseverance in the faith. Please allow that to be the something you are doing.

So to give us an opportunity to apply the sermon and do something, I'm going to do have us end our service a little differently. It's not hugely different, I think you'll see. Please go along with it and be good sports. It will only take three to four minutes and isn't much different than how we normally end our worship. One thing you can say about church and that is that it's not same old, same old, week after week.

In a moment you are going to get up and file out of church. I'm going to ask you to do the getting up early but not file out of the church. I'm going to ask you to move right now towards ... one of twelve stations around the room.

You don't have to sign up. But move toward a station. You don't have to be member to sign up for something. You

don't have to live here year around to sign up for something. You don't have to sign up if you don't want to.

And as we, after two or three minutes of moving, get so we're more or less bunched along the walls, I'm going to tell you a great, ever-so-brief story to conclude the sermon. So the sermon won't be over until the story is. Then we're going to sing our last hymn, and then I'll give the benediction. But when that benediction is said and the shalom is sung, you are going to be really near to where you just might, just might, just might sign up TO DO SOMETHING ... something that will help grow you and the church.

How to do every step of what you sign up for is not on the table. But I or someone will help you get an idea of what it takes.

If the list gets filled, find one that isn't. Or start a waiting list.

So would you stand and move toward a station. It's not quite an altar call. If you don't know which you'd like to do or if you know you don't want to do any, just move toward a station. In a moment we'll sing and then we can go.

Here's the conclusion of the sermon – a story. Marion Hill was born in a fairy tale royal palace in Hungary. Her first spoon was solid gold. When she went to school in Vienna she fell in love with a medical student. After marriage they went to Hollywood, CA and there he dabbled in movies. Eventually he left his medical career to do movies full-time becoming the famed director, Otto Preminger.

Otto's princess could not handle the fast life of Hollywood and declined into drugs, alcohol, affairs, and three

attempts at suicide. After divorcing and moving back to Vienna she met Albert Schweitzer, the medical missionary doctor. She visited with him while he was at home and when he was ready to leave back to his mission station in Africa, she asked if she could go with him. He surprised everyone by saying yes and for the rest of her life Marion cleaned bedpans, made bandages for sores, helped poverty-stricken Africans. When she died, *Time* magazine quoted from her autobiography entitled *All I Want is Everything*. "Albert Schweitzer says there are two kinds of people. There are the helpers, and the non-helpers. I thank God He allowed me to become a helper, and in helping, I found everything."

Let's be helpers.

Hymn

With benediction ... I hope afterwards you will continue to circulate around these tables. Maybe it'll be like a silent auction! God bless.