

## **TREASURES OF THE TRANSFORMED LIFE 3: SATIFYING YOUR SOUL'S THIRST FOR MORE... "Jumping In with Both Feet"**

I had one overriding fear (I have many, but one overriding one Tuesday) as I began to read the sections of our study book for this week. It was that this sermon would be just another in a long line of "why I should go to church", messages; preached to the "choir"; people already in attendance, while those who really need to hear this, lay sleeping in their beds, or doing one of a hundred other things, we all could be doing.

So I set about digging for something deeper, and I hope God and I have unearthed something that might intrigue you, maybe inspire you, definitely invite you to "jump in with both feet". We talked of priming the pump as the Commitment to satisfy our souls longing for more in week one. Last week we studied Prayer as the means to begin drinking deeper from God's abundant well of grace, mercy and love. And today, I want to exhort us all to Jump in with Both Feet as we consider our commitment to Membership. What does it mean to be a member of a local church...is the question on the surface, which leads to the deeper ones: Why does the church exist, and why should I want to be part of it?

I loved this quote from George Bernard Shaw found in the first section of this week's chapter: "I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can." Is that how we ought to feel about being a member of this church? Is that what ought to inspire us as members of the human race? Is belonging to any community really that important? Before you answer, you might want to read this verse...very slowly:

*So it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other. Rom. 12:5*

We belong to each other...we are not alone in this 'following Jesus' adventure... we have chosen to be part of this body...and that means something. It goes back to the reasons the church exists, and that will be our primary discussion today:

## **1. THE CHURCH EXISTS TO EXALT JESUS CHRIST AND PROVIDE A CORPORATE EXPERIENCE FOR PEOPLE TO DO THAT**

As excited as I was to find the quote from Bernard Shaw about belonging to the whole community, I was taken aback by a quote in the second chapter: "The Church doesn't exist to meet your needs, it doesn't exist to meet my needs." Say what? I've always been of the opinion that people ought to attend and be involved in a church where their needs are being met, or where they are being fed. I've actually encouraged people to leave this church and find another, because they felt they were not being fed here, and their needs were not being met here. Now I learn that the church doesn't exist to meet our needs.

Yes, I hope and pray that this church is meeting your needs; but am thankful to be reminded that having our needs met is a secondary purpose of the church. First and foremost the church exists to Exalt Jesus Christ. That is also an individual, personal need humans have. Part of our reason for existence is to provide corporate experiences of Exaltation; we usually call them worship. Listen:

*Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father. Col. 3:16-17*

William Barclay quotes William Temple, the renowned archbishop of Canterbury, as defining worship as "quickening the conscience by the holiness of God, feeding the mind with the truth of God, purging the imagination by the beauty of God, opening the heart to the love of God, and devoting the will to the purpose of God."

A small Austrian village was about to be sacked by Napoleon's great army. On Easter Morning the town's folks and leaders gathered in the church to discuss whether or not they should surrender, or be killed by his advancing and overpowering army. Someone made the motion that since their defeat was inevitable, it was Easter Morning, and they were all gathered in the Cathedral, they may as well worship God till the inevitable destruction came. They all agreed, and instructed the Bell Man, to ring the bells to announce the beginning of worship. He did so with greater gusto and urgency this day.

At that same moment on the hillside overlooking the city, the Master of Napoleon's army heard the ringing of the bells, and wrongly assumed they were peeling and celebrating the arrival of the Austrian Army in the night, and ordered his men to retreat for fear of being overcome by the now emboldened and inspired townspeople.

You see, the church exists to exalt Jesus Christ, and when we do that corporately, our fears can be overcome, our enemies can be banished, and our lives will be spared! AMEN

## **2. THE CHURCH EXISTS TO HELP INDIVIDUAL PEOPLE MEET THEIR NEEDS FOR IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY**

*Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. Ecc. 4:9-10*

I wonder if these verses were the inspiration for John Wesley's famous quote: "The Bible knows nothing of solitary religion". In 1991 George Gallop released a study that discovered the 7 greatest needs identified by the average American. They included:

- the need for shelter and food,
- the need to believe life is meaningful and has a purpose,
- the need for a sense of community and deeper relationships,
- the need to be appreciated and respected,
- the need to be listened to and to be heard,
- the need to feel one is growing, and
- the need for practical help in developing this maturity.

I fully recognize that we in the church don't take our marching orders from George Gallop or any other opinion poll for that matter, but don't you find it interesting how these needs can be met in a church body, and how so many of them can't be met anywhere else? The church may be the most powerful institution on the planet to help people discover and meet their deepest needs.

All of us have identity issues, until we are introduced to the One who made us! All of us have the need to be connected to people, none of us is created to be an island, or to live completely solitary lives. The church...this church exists to help all of us find those important life defining experiences, and it exists to help us make those life defining connections that uniquely satisfy our souls.

I can't leave this point till I make one of the most dramatic John Ed does in his book. I too have noticed and agree with our author that some people who are really connected to their church most often use the pronoun "we", when describing "their", "our" church. And I've also know too many folks who attend church but aren't as committed who refer to the church as "they" and "them" and "those people". You might want to think about which kind of language you use to describe the church...and what that language reveals about what your membership means to you. Just a thought.

### **3. THE CHURCH EXISTS FOR PEOPLE TO GROW TOGETHER AND HOLD EACH OTHER ACCOUNTABLE FOR THAT GROWTH**

*You must warn each other every day, while it is still "today", so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God. Heb. 3:13*

In section one of The Treasures of the Transformed life, John Ed Mathison, used an analogy to describe the culture necessary to grow faithful followers of Jesus. He pointed out that the seed of a Sequoia tree (which can grow up to 400 feet tall) – and the seed of a Bonsai tree, (which only grows 18") are exactly the same size.

What makes the difference are the genetics of each seed, the soil, the nutrients, the fertilizer, the sun, the water, the pruning, and the care given to each tree. Each of those factors has spiritual corollaries for growing our Christian lives.

But here in section three he casually mentions another distinguishing factor of the giant Redwood trees that grow most prominently in California and the Northwestern parts of America. They don't have very deep roots. Most of these giant Sequoia, or Redwoods have roots that only go down a very few feet. What then keeps their towering mass and massive trunks, branches and tops from toppling over? The roots of the great Sequoia are intricately intertwined with other trees growing close to them. That is why you will hardly ever see a Redwood growing independent from other Redwoods...at least not for long.

Don't miss the message; part of the reason the church exists is to help strengthen each of us as we grow our personal relationships closer to God. I was humbled and impressed with how many offers of encouragement I received this week designed to help me with my fledgling prayer life. I point you to the passage in the OT that mentions how iron sharpens iron, and God can use one person to sharpen another; that's how the body of Christ is to function, and is functioning here!

I'm grateful that this church has always placed a strong emphasis on the education of our children, youth and adults, and I'm also excited about the new forms being created to dispense that education to each group. But it takes more than classes or groups, or sermons, or studies. It takes a personal will to decide to keep growing. It takes a 'never satisfied with the status quo' attitude to keep learning until death do us part. It takes perseverance and patience to put up with simple teaching that might be helpful and necessary for a newer believer; while you wait for a meatier morsel to come your way. But that's why our roots are intertwined...so we can feed off each other, and keep each other strong. I like that metaphor!

#### **4. THE CHURCH EXISTS TO SPREAD THE GOOD NEWS TO LOST PEOPLE, AND TO MAKE THE WORLD DIFFERENT**

*Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone, everywhere.* Mk 16:15

The Salvation Army is one of the most recognized and successful helping agencies in the world. Next to the Red Cross this organization has helped more folks in more places in this world than probably any other single organization. You probably know that its founder was William Booth. William had a son, Bramwell, who took over the organization after William died. There is a story that when young Bramwell was about 12 or 13 he and his dad were walking home from Church late one evening when the father surprised the son by taking him into one of the many saloon's in the neighborhood where they passed. The place was crowded with men and women, many of them bearing on their faces the marks of vice and crime; most were drunk. "Willie," Gen. Booth said to his son, "These are our people; these are the people I want you to live for and bring to Christ." Many of us would question the father's wisdom at this action, but years later, Bramwell Booth wrote, "The impression never left me."

I'm afraid it has left some of us. Some of us are more concerned about keeping our church clean, neat and tidy; than we are willing to graciously clean up the messes that ministering to messy people often creates! God already loves broken, wounded, and lost people, calling them HIS children; can't we at least open the doors and welcome them in and call them brothers and sisters? We must if we claim to have the same Father.

The truth of the matter is that most people aren't converted by sermons or Sunday school lessons. I certainly hope those things help, but most people come into the faith because somebody else simply looks them in the eye...and shows them a changed life. That's the kind of witness that changes people's lives and makes the world different. That's the call to multiply that God gives to each Christian, and each Church.

I want to conclude this morning with one other 'nugget' of soul-satisfying truth found in our book under study this week. Mathison points out that there is a difference between being present in church and being in attendance at church. Quote: "You see we can be somewhere physically without actually being there emotionally, spiritually or psychologically. I want to be clear that when I'm talking about the benefits of being present, I mean really being present – being plugged in and aware of the people and situations around us. It's only when we're really present that we can be of any use to someone else. When we're only in physical attendance, but not reaching out or not willing to listen, we may actually be doing more harm than good." I want us all to take our vows of membership seriously, and be "present" as we promised. We need each other. Listen again to the verse that led us into this discussion:

*So it is with Christ's body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other. Rom. 12:5*

Now listen to some of the rest of this great chapter and see if it describes the kind of church you'd like to be part of...like the church we are...and are becoming!

*Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.*

*Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all! Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. Romans 12:9-17*

Jump in with both feet, we need one another...we belong to each other!

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William Temple defines worship as:

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