

THE LEGACY PROJECT 2

“WE WILL LIVE UPSIDE – DOWN”

Last week we began this little mini-series considering our “Legacy Project” by studying how we must live “Backside – Forward”; exploring the concept of converting our Birthright into our Legacy. This morning we continue by considering that our Legacy will involve living, Upside – Down. Let me explain.

The essence of this sermon and this principle is simple: We must convert our worship of God; into a God – honoring way of Life. We often think of worship as a lifting up to God of our praise, our confession, our petitions, our prayers, our joys, our concerns, our hopes and dreams, and though worship is all that , it is more than all that! Worship is encountering God with our whole being, and being encountered by God with God’s Wholeness as well!

Worship, as essential and great as it is, with all its multiple methods, styles, and systems; is only half the story of being an authentic Christian, and this is where the “down-side”, comes in. Far too many Christians wrongly believe that worship is all that is required of modern day believers. Worship is essential, but its not the final chapter on being a Christian. We need to recognize that Authentic Worship defined by Jesus as “Spirit and Truth”, involves authentic living...after we have finished worship! Better, in fact, would be to come to recognize that all the aspects of our lives are actually acts of worship in the most wholistic sense possible. Living Upside Down, means that we as a Church, and individual participants there of, must convert our Worship (UPSIDE) into a God-pleasing, and God-honoring way of life (DOWNSIDE). We must live upside-down!

Why is this important? It seems to me that the longer we live the Christian life, the more prone we are to succumb to the temptation to believe that being a Christian is about showing up for church, using the right language, believing the right theology, and preserving the right religious traditions.

In doing those important things, we overlook, or forget, or intentionally ignore that being a Christian is also about living in such a way that God is pleased and others are engaged with the prospect of coming to know God as well. I call that living Upside – Down; converting our Worship into a God – honoring way of life!

Worship is not just something we do an hour a week, being a Christian is not just believing certain things; being an authentic follower of Jesus means that, primarily through our worship, we become more and more like Jesus, and our lives begin to look more and more like his! But that worship, must hit the streets and be translated into a life-style that honors God and impacts God's world. Worship in a sense is not just something we do, it is partly at least, who we are, and that identity must play itself out in our daily rituals and routines; in our daily lives.

In a more concrete application to First Church, at this moment; I believe that we are entertaining an improper notion that this building, or a new building on North Washington, is who or what we are; called First United Methodist Church. Some of us have come to love and in a sense 'worship' this building. Some of us are falling in love with the idea that a new building will better serve us, or allow us to serve better. Here is the bottom line, and warning from on high, to both groups! Whenever any building becomes anything more than a tool that God uses to reach people with the Gospel, and disciple those being reached, it has become an idol. Some have made an idol of this place, and some are making an idol of the idea of a new place, and when we begin to worship any thing, other than God, we are in trouble! Listen to this harsh warning from 2 Kings:

“But the Israelites would not listen. They were stubborn as their ancestors who had refused to believe in the Lord their God. They rejected his decrees and the covenant he had made with their ancestors, and they despised all his warnings. They worshiped worthless idols, so they become worthless themselves.” 2 Kings 17: 14-15

Making an idol of a building, or anything else but God Himself, even to make an idol of worship by disconnecting it from our way of life; is idolatry, and wrong, and makes those worshipers...worthless! So...what then does a God –honoring way of life look like? How can we make sure our worship is being authentically lived out in our lives? How can we live Upside – Down? I’m so glad you asked. The latter half of the NT is filled with practical applications for living a Christian life, but one passage in particular ties our Worship (Upside) to our way of life (Downside) here it is:

“By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence. And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world’s corruption cause by human desires.

In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God’s promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone.” 2 Peter 1: 3-7

Everything we need to live a godly life we have received by coming to know God. Coming to know God, through Jesus, involves some great and precious promises. Those promises enable us to share his divine nature, (we don’t become little God’s as some cults teach, but we become like God, through experiencing Christ’s forgiveness).

In light of all this, Peter reminds us that it is our responsibility to respond to all God’s promises, by supplementing our faith with 7 characteristics that define a God-honoring life, and life style. We respond to God’s promises through prayer, through reading and responding to the Word, through interaction with other believers, but primarily through worship. In a sense, we must translate our Worship into a God honoring lifestyle that will look like this:

Supplement your faith with:

1. Moral Excellence,

We live in a disconnected world, don't we? The greatest disconnect I see rampant in our world today is the chasm between faith and life that permeates our culture, even church culture. There are Christian young people who 'know all the right words' of the Christian faith, who are engaging in all kinds of illicit and immoral behavior, and failing to see the connection between living a Christian life, and being responsible with their sexual choices.

There are Christian not so young people who are professing the Christian faith, but worshipping at the altar of consumer filled careers; conducting illicit business deals, and engaging in shady tax schemes all in an effort to get ahead. There is an apparent disconnect between our profession of faith, and our daily way of life.

The Christian faith revealed by Jesus Christ contains a specific moral code, and that code is excellence. Our faith must affect our lives, our decisions, our relationships, our work, our parenting, our schooling, our leisure, our money, and our legacies! Amen?

2. Knowledge,

Far be it from me, who spent 8 years at an educational institution, to downplay the importance of knowledge to the Christian faith. I'm not saying knowledge is not important, just not the only means of salvation. There are certain right and wrong beliefs that must be imbedded into our lives, but even that right knowledge is secondary to a right (personal) relationship with Jesus Christ.

There is an inexhaustible reservoir of deep truth that sincere Christians must swim in every day. We'll never know it all, and what we know will never save us apart from being applied to the way we live, but we must daily drink deeply from the wellsprings of God's wisdom, knowledge and intellect. There is a reason God gave us a brain, and it's not just to hold up our hats!

3. Self-control,

Notice the connection between these characteristics. Immediately after knowledge grows self-control. Self-control is also mentioned in the 5th chapter of Galatians as one of the fruit of the Spirit. Self-control is not a natural phenomenon; we are not born with this character. We are born with an innate sense of selfishness, and self-determination, think back to the Garden of Eden, or your own 1 or 2 year old. Did you have to teach your kids the word “Mine”? We didn’t either.

Self-control grows out of self-submission. Even those who don’t know God, who have self-control, do so because they have subjugated their personal wills to a greater cause, and it plays out in self-control. For a Christian, self-control increases comparatively with our ability to yield our lives to God, God’s son, and God’s Spirit. Self-control is one of the major marks of a Christian who is going on to perfection.

4. Patient Endurance,

Here is where the rubber meets the road. Having patience until we get paid a week from Friday is one (insignificant) thing. Having patience while we grieve the loss of a loved one who died prematurely, or tragically, is quite another. It is a mark of a true Christian who can patiently endure more than their share of hardship, suffering, injustice, or inequity. It ought to define all of us who wish to convert our worship into a God-honoring way of life, that we are patient with what we don’t or can’t understand.

We often hear of the Patience of Job, and he was, but don’t for one minute think that suffering unjustly was something he or anyone else finds pleasant. They just tie a knot at the end of their rope and hang on till God sees fit to come and save them. Even when he comes, he often comes in unexpected ways. Job is filled with chapter after chapter of questions upon more questions...and how does God answer them? With more questions!

That is often the way of God, to work the will of God, in the lives of God's children. We don't understand it, it's hard to accept, but patient endurance is an outcropping of the conversion of our worship...into a God-honoring way of life; upside down living!

5. Godliness,

Godliness is what we have been talking about all morning; it is being a reflection or a shadow, if you will, of God himself. A shadow is not the real thing, but a real reflection of the real thing. As Christians seeking to live authentic lives, we must continually strive to have the nature and character of God born and grown in us. From the moment of our salvation, till we draw our last breath, (and probably beyond), our lives are to be an unquenchable thirsting after the nature and character of God.

Godliness, or holiness, or sainthood, or even radical commitments have fallen out of favor in our modern culture, but they have not fallen out of favor with God. Deciding to be a Christian is not enough, deciding to accept Jesus, as if that were the end all of life's decisions is just plain ignorant; yet churches across the western landscape are filled with just such pew-dwellers. You don't see that in Bolivia, or probably other places in the third world. I'm not saying you have to go or be born in an impoverished place to grow to be like Jesus, I'm just saying that going on to godliness is a major inconvenience for self-absorbed Americans, even Christian ones, but it's an essential way of life in other parts of the world, and must become that again in our own land!

Sour old grouchy saints aren't much of an inspiration for young fledglings Christians to follow, so let's become sweeter, and gentler and more humble as we become more like God.

6. Brotherly affection,

7. Love for everyone.

I'm going to reveal the last two together even though there is an undeniable distinction made in this verse between brotherly affection and love for everyone. I want to reinforce that same distinction! Churches and individual members thereof must never forget that our worship of God must be translated into an active love life; for those of our faith, those in the family, those like-minded believers who also know and love Jesus Christ. BUT, we must also reserve love for those who are yet to know Jesus Christ.

It's easy to love the family, at least most families, at least most of the time. It's not so easy to love strangers, especially those who don't look or act like we think they should, or those who don't know the secret handshake, or the lodge language, or the corporate culture of button downs and blue blazers. But Peter; and I believe he was mimicking Jesus, states for the record a powerful reminder that love is not exclusive for those inside, but it is inclusive for those on the outside as well.

The conclusion of the matter is this: Whether we stay in this building for another 50 years, or relocate to a new building on N. Washington, we must not; we will not be able to worship a building. Our legacy will never be a building! We are not celebrating 50 years of this building, but 50 years of faithful and fruitful ministry that partially resided and generated from this building.

We will not be able even to fall in love with worship itself, as an end in itself, as helpful, meaningful and necessary as worship is. In the decades to come, FUMC, must live its life, (meaning we must live our lives) Upside – Down! Converting our essential worship into a style of life, and a life itself, that honors no one but God. In fact, we must live in such a way that if there were no God...our lives would be completely unexplainable to the unsuspecting and watchful eyes in our culture and community. Backside forward, and upside down, next week; inside out! Don't miss it!

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Supplement your faith with generous provisions of:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____