

Growing to Bear Fruit

Wilhelmina; June 16, 2024

Sermon Outline

- GOAL: I want those gathered for worship at Wilhelmina to believe that is God who *creates* faith and *continues to grow* faith (sanctifying us and making us holy) through the Word.
- FCF: Our sinful nature interrogates us and wants us to believe that making ourselves holy is our responsibility thereby resisting God's work.
- GA: Christ has made and is making us holy through the Truth of His Word.
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Psalm 1 (ESV)

Blessed is the man

who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;

²but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.

³He is like a tree
planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.

In all that he does, he prospers.

⁴The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

⁵Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;

⁶for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

2 Corinthians 5:1-10 (ESV)

For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ²For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, ³if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. ⁴For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

⁶So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, ⁷for we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. ¹⁰For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

Mark 4:26-34 (ESV)

And he said, “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. ²⁷ He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. ²⁸ The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. ²⁹ But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”

³⁰ And he said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? ³¹ It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, ³² yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

³³ With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. ³⁴ He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.

Also reference:

John 17:11b-19

Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. ¹² While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³ But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. ¹⁴ I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁵ I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

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Sunday, June 16, 2024

[Slide 1]

Many of you have a lamp in your house which, once it has been plugged in and the bulb is burning, gives you the option to dim the light. A dimmer switch is a control that enables you to restrict the flow of the electrical power in the circuit. When you turn the dial or slide the button the power remains accessible but the resistance in the electrical flow gives you a way to dim the light.

Jesus talked about us being a light.

You heard the words and the charge to Bennett this morning after his baptism.

It's a word to Jonathan and Jessica and to each of us as well. The words came from Matthew 5:14 – He (Jesus) said: “You are the light of the world.” **[Slide 2]** then added: **[Slide 3]**

“Let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father” (v. 16).

When a person is shining God's light he is engaging in activities like:

- forgiving (just as God forgave us, we forgive).
- offering grace and loving others sacrificially
- bringing joy (God brings us joy and so we can share it with others)
- etc.

These are the type of “good deeds” Jesus intended us to do.
Just as the lamp must have a power supply so do we.

[Slide 4]

God gives us the gift of faith and desires to make us a growing light in the world.
God gives us power to forgive, to offer grace, to love sacrificially and in various ways to overcome darkness.
God’s forgiveness and power is always present

BUT we can resist that power and restrict the amount of light in our lives.

Sometimes we don’t want to forgive others who have hurt us, we are selfish in our attitudes,
we get angry and occasionally we even want to stay angry.

“Lord, in Your mercy, grant each of us a willing spirit to enable us to shine Your light.
Holy Spirit work through our lives enabling us to shine ever brighter.”

Writing to the Christian Church, John says,

“If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another,
and the blood of Jesus, his son, purifies us from all sin.”

Fellowship with God is walking in the light. What we’ve invited God to do this morning in Bennett’s life is to initiate the flow of the Holy Spirit in his life that would culminate in eternal life through Jesus Christ.

As he, and each of us journey through life God calls us to bear the light.

We can confess together that sometimes we do so brightly, other times rather dimly.

The image of the dimmer switch is appropriate, we know that there are seasons in which our light seems to fade – it’s as if there is a gravitational pull downward decreasing our glow. And there is!

Our sin nature causes us to fail in our ability to be the light on the hill,
to be weak in doing good deeds that bring glory to the Father and stir others to praise God.

We’re going to hold onto two analogies of faith this morning:

this first one of a light growing brighter and a second one, of a seed that grows into a tree.

[Slide 5]

We began our service reading from Psalm 1.

It referenced a tree planted by streams of water:

Blessed is the man

*who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;*

²*but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.*

³*He is like a tree*

*planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.*

The blessed man is one who is like a tree planted by a stream of water.

What is necessary for a tree (or any plant) to grow is that a seed germinates.

As it relates to growth as a Christian, animating and bringing to life a germinated seedling of faith is what we’ve invited the Holy Spirit to do in Bennett’s life today.

The Gospel text from Mark 4 is in a section of agrarian illustrations that Jesus uses to teach about how faith develops and the kingdom of God grows. At the beginning of the chapter was the well-known parable about seed being sown on different types of ground that restricted or prevented the seeds to grow (birds snatching away the seed, rocky ground preventing roots from going deep, or being surrounded by weeds choking out the good seed from growing strong because it is overwhelmed by the competition for nutrients and light).

In verses 26-27 Jesus is recorded as teaching:

“The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground.

*²⁷ He sleeps and rises night and day, and **the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how.***

[Slide 6]

A seedling is planted that has capacity to grow into a tree, but how it all happens is mystery.

Light is created and power is given to grow it brighter, and in this case too, we know not exactly how. We trust and invite the growth will happen – in the little tree and in the growing light. We seek not to stifle it.

We confess that what happens as a seedling of faith is planted in a child is mystery.

When and how it sprouts beginning to develop and grow we know not.

It is God’s work that Jonathan and Jessica have invited in Bennett’s life.

Every day they rely on God’s work through the Word to nurture, develop and grow Bennett’s faith.

Seeking not to stifle it.

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As Bennett and each of us seize the opportunity to meditate on God’s Word, according to the Psalm, we will be blessed. The Word of Truth is not stifled but given opportunity to grow.

The Word reminds us that through Jesus we are blessed to be brought into a right relationship with God.

The theological term for that is “Justified.”

JUSTIFIED – perhaps you’ve heard it described as “just as if I had never sinned.”

When we are justified we are made pure, holy and blameless, forgiven, because of the shed blood of Christ.

A light is supplied the power to shine – a gift.

A little tree is given the nutrients and conditions to grow – a gift.

A seed of faith is given that mysterious ability to germinate and begin to grow – a gift.

Being justified, made right before God, is a gift.

Justification is not alone however.

The process of growth,...the increasing glow of a light shining brighter and with increased intensity happens as we are SANCTIFIED.

The sanctification process, like the process of growth,...the germinated seed of faith is strengthened.

Faith grows and in so doing we become more and more like Jesus increasingly able to do the good deeds we’re called to do.

In a passage from John 17 Jesus prays for his disciples, it is a prayer that extends down through history to those who follow Jesus today.

Jesus prays to the Father:

“Sanctify them in Your truth, Your Word is truth.”

[Slide 8]

Jesus is asking the Heavenly Father to be growing faith in the Word of Truth.

There is a frenzy of voices all around us that we can get caught up in, words that are not true, leading us to be disoriented and dismayed. Seemingly credible sources that are in conflict with one another leaving us confused.

It is the work of God’s Spirit to remind us where truth is to be found.

In Psalm 119:105 –

“Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and light unto my path.”

[Slide 9]

GOD’s Word gives certainty in the midst of all that is shifting and ever-changing.

Jesus uses the illustration of a grain of mustard seed as his parable of the kingdom of God.

A mustard seed, *“the smallest of all the seeds on earth, ³² yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”*

Faith, sown as a seedling, possesses all the blessings of God’s promise, though hidden from sight.

But God will use the Law in the Scriptures to make us aware of our old nature, that selfish part of us that needs to die in order to shine a bright light. And we’re called by the good news of the Gospel into good works that stem forth from faith alone.

God’s Truth and the Word of God sanctify us and make us holy by giving us God’s salvation plan. That word does a deep work of making Jesus known and applying His Truth to our hearts.

As we spend time in the study of Scriptures, as we participate in worship of God, God’s grace is delivered to us and the sanctification process has opportunity to happen in our lives..

[Slide 10]

We’ve used the analogy of a dimmer switch, another technical name for it is a rheostat.

A rheostat is a resistor limiting the voltage getting through to the light bulb.

By turning away from God’s Word of Truth we can resist God’s work of grace in our lives.

As we do so, sanctification is hindered.

When we resist dealing with sin we live in guilt and as a result the amount of light we emit is limited.

However, it must be accentuated that just as the moon isn’t able to generate its own light, so too we are unable to be holy in and of ourselves. The moon reflects the light of the sun, so too we receive light from the holiness of God.

Holiness is a 100% God thing and a 0% human thing.

We can exercise to get into physical shape.

We can study hard and get into mental shape.

But we cannot sanctify ourselves into holy shape.

Conclusion

The analogies in the message today have been growing light and growing seedling, one last one as we close. Some of you have been sailing, perhaps a catamaran.

[Slide 11]

In order to sail one is not passive, you have a role. Hoisting the sails, steering the rudder are parts one can and need to do - but unless the wind is blowing you don't get anywhere.

If the wind doesn't blow, any momentum dies.

When the wind blows, sailing is exciting!

So too in the Christian life in the sanctification process we respond to the move of God's Spirit.

Those born of God have been given the Holy Spirit as a guarantee.

In John 3: 8 Jesus says,

"The wind blows where it chooses. You hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

There is mystery in God's work, how the seeds of faith sprout and grow, we know not how. But the kingdom of God among us grows through the work of the Holy Spirit. And those who believe will grow in truth, being perfected, being made holy that we might shine and reflect God's glory through Christ Jesus within us.

"Come, Holy Spirit, come and do this work. Amen."

Prayer to close.