

Travelling Light: simplicity

Reconnect – January 3, 2010

Text: Ephesians 4:21-27; Matthew 6:31-33

Key Thought: The life God wants us to enjoy with Him is simple: free of phoniness, confusion and anxiety.

Since you have heard all about him and have learned the truth that is in Jesus, throw off your old evil nature and your former way of life, which is rotten through and through, full of lust and deception. Instead, there must be a spiritual renewal of your thoughts and attitudes. You must display a new nature because you are a new person, created in God's likeness – righteous, holy, and true. So put away all falsehood and 'tell your neighbour the truth' because we belong to each other. And 'don't sin by letting anger gain control over you.' Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a mighty foothold to the Devil.
Eph. 4:21-27, NLT

Pre-Intro: "Trinity" (words and music by Jennifer Knapp)

You in the mirror. starin back at me. O' conscience let me be....to the pure, all things are pure.

To those who defiled unbelieving: nothing is pure. Their minds, their conscience defiled.

They profess to know God. But deceive him by deeds all the while.

Where do I stand on the rock or in the sand?

O' Holy Spirit won't you help me understand, Holy spirit won't you say a prayer for me?

With your groanings. My mind, my conscience defiled! send the blood of the Lamb, don't leave me in exile.

What was the promise on the Cross of Calvary? Confess the Lord and the truth shall set you free...

create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a steadfast spirit within me.

To my prayers you've always given heed. Blessed be thy God.

Who never turned away from me. Hid his face from all my sin, forgot, forgot my iniquity.

Go on and raise your hands sing praises to the Lord.

He's the King and He'll reign forevermore. He died upon the cross at Calvary. He died to save a wretch like me!

Intro: Let's talk resolutions

- I thought that would be a great song to start this off this morning, because it's so honest – a brutal look in the mirror, and then crying out to God to make a change
- Speaking of change, it's that time of year again...

Q: Anyone have any resolutions they want to share?

Q: Anyone given up already? Or are we all starting tomorrow?

Q: Anyone keep their 2009 resolution? Any success stories? Or really good failures?

- We make resolutions because we want a better life, ultimately – we want the next year to be better than the last, to achieve, to improve, to be happy and healthy and smart and rich and all kinds of great stuff
- Unfortunately, the reasons we make resolutions in the first place are also, generally, what stop us from being able to keep them – we can't escape ourselves or change enough to counteract our own effects – we are our own Kryptonite
- We all have it, right? What we accumulate over the years of our lives - not just stuff, but attitudes, biases, preconceptions, limitations, experiences, things that hold us back from the life we could have
- So how do we leave our limitations behind? How do we get rid of our baggage? How can we find a way to "travel light"?
- After all, there's a lot on the line – think about what a life more free might look like? A life that wasn't bound by... us – ourselves, our own worst enemies?

One way to travel light: simplicity

- Freedom – that's one of the essential parts of what we're focusing on today, which is the practice of simplicity – so let's talk about simplicity...

Q: What comes to mind when you hear that word? (poverty, organic, granola-crunchers, eco-, farming...)

Q: Is it a positive or negative connotation for you? Why?

Q: If I said that someone lived a life of simplicity, what would you think I meant by that?

- We're probably all ready for a little bit of simplicity – whatever it is! – after the Christmas season
- When I think simplicity, I think of cutting through the noise, through the hype, through the STUFF, to something that's worthwhile, something that's clear-cut, something that WORKS
- Anyone get any presents that they didn't need? Or did you kids get any presents they didn't need?
- We took some of Christmas 2009 to the Salvation Army yesterday... and probably could have taken a lot more of it, but we're hoping against hope that some of the stuff will find a use
- Maybe a better question: did anyone (including your kids) get a present that they needed, or that they are actually going to use come the end of January? What was it? What makes it that way?
- It was Christmas and preparing for it that got me thinking about simplicity – because for whatever reason, I always associate that word with STUFF – with possessions, and the idea of simplicity then becomes living a life with fewer things, not more – which is a good thing but VERY counterCanadian, I might add – maybe monks, or farmers
- (although, I read last week about the Shaolin fighting monks, and how they are now big business)
- But simplicity is about more than stuff – and if we really do want to “travel light”, then simplicity is a good place to start lightening our “life-load”
- I see it as having three “free-of” elements: free of phoniness, free of confusion, and free of anxiety
- Which one should we talk about first? How about free of phoniness...

Free of... phoniness:

- Everywhere we go, we are surrounded by images – which reflects how preoccupied our Canada is with the idea of image – of perception of reality
- We need to look good – we need to stay young – we need to be fashionable, we need to be fit, we need to be hip, cool, with it, phat with a “ph”, you know, like the kids say
- Truth and sincerity are the enemies of that – you can't be vulnerable, you can't be real – you can't let people in, because then they might call you out on the exterior – you have to keep them at arm's length as a part of your deception
- We also need to look like we have it together – we need to live in a nice house, have nice stuff, nice new stuff, and if there's a new thing, well, we need a newer thing
- Need is irrelevant – and even desire becomes irrelevant – it doesn't matter if you need it or even if you WANT it – you are driven to have to have it, because it is part of the life in the 'burbs **expectation**
- And since living up to expectations is never fun – at best, it's what is expected, and at worst, it's incredibly frustrating to try – well, joy is sucked out of life – isn't there anything... **simpler?**

Free of... confusion:

- It gets worse – because that hamster wheel, that living up to expectations of image, leads to confusion
- Why are we doing this? What's the end game? Who are we doing it for? And are we keeping up? Where's our scorecard? What size is our TV? How new is our car?
- Listen to this quote from spiritual writer Richard Foster:

Contemporary culture lacks both the inward reality and the outward life-style of simplicity. We must live in the modern world, and we are affected by its fractured and fragmented state. We are trapped in a maze of competing attachments. One moment we make decisions on the basis of sound reason and the next moment out of fear of what others will think of us. We have no unity or focus around which our lives are oriented.

Because we lack a divine Center our need for security has led us into an insane attachment to things. We really must understand that the lust for affluence in contemporary society is psychotic. It is psychotic because it has completely lost touch with reality. We crave things we neither need nor enjoy. "We buy things we do not want to impress people we do not like." Where planned obsolescence leaves off, psychological obsolescence takes over. We are made to feel ashamed to wear clothes or drive cars until they are worn out. The mass media have convinced us that to be out of step with fashion is to be out of step with reality. It is time we awaken to the fact that conformity to a sick society is to be sick.

(Foster, Celebration of Discipline, 80)

- Can you believe that he wrote that in 1988? That was more than 20 years ago – and yet it's even more true and obvious now than it was then – incredible and prophetic
- We don't know whether we're coming or going – and life gets busy – not just busy, but frenzied – like a kid hopped up on candy in a room full of new toys (just like Xmas morning...!) who can't decide what to play with, and then winds up not playing, but "getting played" by the toys – somewhere, they get out of control and stop enjoying themselves – the neurons aren't meant to fire that, and the dopamine is going crazy – or something like that!
- We fill our time working hard and playing even harder, to the point where all the lines get blurry, and there's no rest in our recreation – and therefore we're not getting "re-created" at all, contrary to our **expectations**
- Isn't there anything... **simpler?**

Free of... anxiety:

- Confusion – the confusion of our lives, the “why’s” and the “what for’s” leads to, or comes along with anxiety – phoniness leads to confusion, which brings anxiety
- Worry – how can we keep keeping up? Where will the money come from? What if it all comes crashing down? Stress! After all – it’s hard work keeping up an image – which might one day be discovered to be something less than real – and THEN what would people say?
- And we can’t be honest about anxiety – it’s just not done – it goes against our Canadian **expectations**, again – we don’t want to look like we can’t do it or admit weakness – so we muddle on, through the confusion – and we worry
- What do we worry about? What do we NOT worry about? Money, kids, job, economy, environment – you name it, we’ll worry about it
- Am I the only one who reads about how we’re supposed to recover from the recession by all of us continuing to spend on big ticket items – when we’re all collectively tapped out – and then interest rates are going to rise in 2010 as the bills have to get paid?
- Is life supposed to be this hard? Isn’t there anything **simpler**?

God’s response: a simple life, with him at the centre

- There is – God offers a simpler life – a life of simplicity
- The section of the Bible read earlier this morning is God’s message through St. Paul to the world of his time, and to the world of our time too – life doesn’t have to be phony and confusing and anxious
- Paul was an ironic choice to bring that message, because if anyone had led a complicated life, it was Paul – he’d had multiple careers, lived in different worlds, spoke multiple languages, was a first century road warrior who never spent too long in one place, and had different groups of people trying to kill him at any given time
- Not only that, but he’d made mistakes and he had regrets, too – he’d had people locked up, beaten, killed – he’d been an up and comer, and he’d thrown it all away – he’d given all he had to his new cause, including his health and his every waking moment, night and day
- How can THIS guy talk about simplicity?
- But the joy of his life – the peace, the genuineness, the settledness, the clarity of his life – it shone through every time he opened his mouth or sent someone a letter – **he travelled light**
- Listen to what he said to a letter that was sent to a bunch of his churches:

Since you have heard all about him and have learned the truth that is in Jesus, throw off your old evil nature and your former way of life, which is rotten through and through, full of lust and deception. Instead, there must be a spiritual renewal of your thoughts and attitudes. You must display a new nature because you are a new person, created in God’s likeness – righteous, holy, and true.

- Most times our resolutions are tied to actions – we try to change what we do, because we figure if we do that, then the results of those actions will be different, and we will change

- But Paul backs it up further – he says that everything starts in the mind – between our ears – and what we need is a whole new mindset – a new perspective, a new worldview, a new way of interpreting everything around us – that will cut through the clutter and get to **simple**
- And that new mindset, that new mind, comes out of a unique and new relationship with God – God gives a person a new mind, recreated and renewed by Him and His power
- We can't make that happen – it's his gift, and it comes when we make a conscious choice to turn our life over to Him and His care
- But it's not just getting zapped by God that will change you and I, either – Paul is pretty clear that we need to throw off our former ways and put on our new way of life, our new nature – we have a part to play in this

So put away all falsehood and 'tell your neighbour the truth' because we belong to each other. And 'don't sin by letting anger gain control over you.' Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a mighty foothold to the Devil.

- Don't try to control (through deception) and don't BE controlled (through your own anger) – instead, practice simplicity – a God-centered life

The weight of expectations

- But are we just trading one set of expectations for another? What our Canadian society expects with what God expects? Isn't it just as hard to please one as the other?
- There is a difference – God is more than willing – in fact He WANTS to help us live up to them, and He'll never give up on us in the face of failure
- We read our own attitudes into our relationship with God, our own insecurities – but we have no idea how wrong we are, and how amazing his love and forgiveness are
- God wants to do this for us – like the Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs clip - God wants to put a monkey translator on us and let us go for it!

Key Thought:

The life God wants us to enjoy with Him is simple: free of phoniness, confusion and anxiety.

Don't worry about having enough food or drink or clothing. Why be like the Canadians who are so deeply concerned about these things? Your heavenly Father will give you all you need from day to day if you live for him and make the Kingdom of God your primary concern.

Matthew 6:31-33, NLT

How do we get to simplicity? What does it look like?

- Foster lists three essential attitudes that will change our outsides:
 - **Everything we have comes from God**
 - **God will look after what He gives us**
 - **God gives to us so we can share with others**
- But how do we get those?
 - **Time with God – to learn to trust Him**
 - **Time reading the Bible**
 - **Time spent reflecting on your life – to see Him in it**

Conclusion: a longing for simplicity

- [Play video “Big Time” by Peter Gabriel – lead into Q & A]

Response: Q & A

Q: What does simplicity look like for you? (one specific thing)

Q: What have you found successful for you?

[Foster’s 10 outward realities – list from the book]