

NEW 8 WEEK SERMON SERIES:

**Growing
Pains**



9-27-20 Sermons Part 1 and Part 2

Sunday: September 27, 2020

Scriptural Lesson: Philippians 2: 1-13

Message: Growing Pains: Being Part 1

Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

We are continuing with our Growing Pains series and this week we will look at the growing pains of “being”.

And what I mean by being, is examining how you and I are invited to be and respond and relate to the larger community known as the church.

For you and I, we are the church.

So the idea is if you and I can examine, develop and grow into being like Christ, then together we will become a church that can and will transform the world.

And so looking at Paul’s letter to the people of Philippi, in many ways, Paul's epistle to the Philippians is like a letter to home from a soldier anticipating that he may soon die.

Paul wrote Philippians at a time when he was suffering greatly,

Paul wrote this letter at a time when he wondered if he might soon be killed.

Most importantly, Paul wrote to people he loved.

For all in all they were the church to be modeled after, similar to First UMC Lincoln...

The church of Philippi was one of Paul’s first churches that he planted.

And so, his words to the Christians in Philippi were heavy

but caring; sad yet consoling; appreciative but bittersweet. From Paul's perspective, they could well be his final words of advice and heartfelt thanks to his faithful friends.

Therefore, one of Paul's main goals was to emphasize that the Holy Spirit of God was here and ready to come into their lives and transform them to be like Christ.

The issue or implied tension within this passage is that the church of Philippi; although a good church who committed to support the proclamation of the gospel, they were still going through some division if you can believe that....

(wink, wink)

We know that in chapter 4 of Philippians, two women have a disagreement; **Euodia** (Greek Εὐοδία, meaning unclear, but possibly "sweet fragrance"[1][2] or "prosperous journey"[3]) and **Syntyche which means fortunate or with fate.**

We can assume that there were other disagreements beforehand, for I stopped by to say that even in the best church communities there will still be disagreements.

For where there are people, there will be disagreements!

However Paul's exhortation within this letter was more of what I would like to call a proactive warning to let the people know that yes there will be disagreements, but we must learn to settle those disagreements before a division happens.

For according to Paul, division in the Church is incompatible with the indwelling Spirit of God.

Paul strongly implies that schism and faction in fact, grieve the Spirit and jeopardize the participation (*koinōnia*) of the Spirit.

So how you and I get to a place of not allowing a disagreement to end up in division I propose, is through a process of self-examination.

A self-examination that might explore what it means to live, behave and think like Christ.

Now on the surface, to strive to be like Christ may be difficult for **some if not most of us.**

For there are some instances for me; as I go through my own self-examination process, where it is relatively easy for me to be Christ like in my actions.

If there is someone in need like I mentioned last week, I have no problem sharing or helping to point that individual to the direction where he/she can receive help.

There are other instances however, if I am honest, it is not (as the common adage says), as black and white for me.

For I am struggling with some of the outcomes that are occurring within our country as it pertains to race relations and our overall judicial system.

I am struggling with many aspects of our current government and administration.

I am struggling with most aspects of our health care system and the response to the pandemic that we are currently in...A personal example of a health care issue; I learned that with the Endoscopy I am supposed to receive on October 6, that even though the GI doctor is ordering me to have this procedure; a procedure that could indeed save my life in the future as it rules out cancer of the stomach and esophagus; something that is part of my family history; I learned that since we have not met our deductible at all our insurance will not cover any of it. They are coding this as an elective procedure. Now we are able to get a payment plan, but still....**I am struggling** with the thought of what if we were not able to make a Payment arrangement? What about others who desperately need services with no health insurance?

I am struggling with as a mom and a woman for the Future of my daughters and every other girl and woman; that all of the progress made for women's rights matters.... will regress.

Heck, **I am struggling** with how to deliver the gospel in the midst of all of these realities and more.

Furthermore, these issues for me and more, are what makes it a little more difficult to discern at times, how might Christ respond.

It is these instances where I worry if I am able to see past my disappointment, grief, frustration and more and still reflect the image and light of Christ.

I suppose what I am saying (in being honest in this self-examination process that I only barely scraped the surface of in this message);is that **I struggle with** the gray areas where the Bible does not always address some of the things we are experiencing explicitly.

I struggle in times where it seems like justice is just a fantasy and injustice has become the norm.

I struggle with the fact that we live in a world where it seems as if evil is winning!

Is there anyone out there who struggles with some of these same things and more?!

So I take this struggle and all of the emotions that come with it back to Paul's letter, and I consider what Paul may suggest to me and perhaps you in the midst of our struggles.

And I am reminded that how you and I begin to work through the gray areas of our struggles and frustrations is with the help of **the Holy Spirit**.

The Holy Spirit; the promised Advocate who was sometimes not as easy to detect in particular within the Old Testament;

For the Holy Spirit would normally fall upon the leaders and prophets it seemed at will...

But after Jesus came to Earth, died, rose and then ascended into heaven; the Holy Spirit remained with all of us as a gift; a comforter; a guide; made available to all who are open to the Spirit.

And the most beautiful thing about the Holy Spirit, is that just as the Spirit was in the beginning; hovering over the Earth with God and Jesus during creation, God's prevenient grace has been activated in our life from the very beginning in our lives at birth as well.

The Word tells us in Genesis 1: 26 that God proclaimed; *"Let us make humankind in our image, in our likeness,* So what this means is just like a parent watches over their child and raises her, nurturing him and cultivating the characteristics of that child ; the Holy Spirit watches over us in the same fashion; drawing out and communicating with that image of God (Imago Dei) that is within all of us. So the good news is that as we strive to live into this image of Christ; we are not doing this work independently. In fact, the essence of Christ is within all of us; starting out as a tiny mustard seed with the potential to grow exponentially.

The best news is that I believe that at some point in our lives, the Image of God within us will also call out to the Holy Spirit; some of us just may not know or recognize this

yet.

In the book *Made to Crave* by Lysa Terkhurst, this is the premise of her book.

That many times when our inner being is longing for purpose and fulfillment; we are actually longing for this spiritual connection with God;

Just like a child longs for his/her parent; especially at the tender age where nourishment and cultivation is especially needed; you and I were intrinsically made to crave God.

For as God's children and being made in God's image, then this should not be that much of a surprise should it?

Furthermore, there was one section of the author's book that really let me know that the Holy Spirit can guide us on how to be Christ like in those gray areas of our lives;

And this is when Lysa the author went through her own self-examination process and discovered how much like God she really was and how much God appreciated and thought of her.

In her process she learned that she was a forgiven child of God; (Romans 3:24)

She learned that she was a set-free child of God; (Romans 8: 1-2)

She learned that she was an accepted child of God; (1 Cor. 1:2)

She discovered that she was the holy Child of God; (1 Cor. 1:30)

She learned that she was the made-new child of God; (2 Cor.5:17)

She discovered that she was the loved child of God; (Eph1:4)

She learned that she was the confident child of God; (Eph 3:12)

Finally she learned in her self-examination process that she is and always will be the victorious child of God (Romans 8:37)—which lets us all know that as children of God, we can be everything Paul in his letter encourages us to be and more;

All we have to do is just put our self into the position of our author and learn to crave God;

Crave God's word;

Crave God's wisdom;

Crave God's Comfort;

Crave God's disposition;

By craving God, the biggest aha moment I have discovered is that our spiritual DNA; the image of God (imago Dei) within us; will latch onto the Spirit of God; The Holy Spirit will walk with us, talk with us; God's Spirit will be so evident that we will wonder why we might have never noticed it before;

Craving God I believe is the pathway to living the life that God has intended and hoped for you and me.

For me this is the essence of being!

September 27:10:45 service

First Lesson: Psalm 78: 1-4, 12-16

Gospel Lesson: Matthew 21: 23-32

Sermon: Growing Pains: Living

Preacher: Kirstie Engel

We are continuing with our Growing Pain series and this week we will be looking at the growing pains of living together as it pertains to the larger church (part 2).

During our 8:30 service this morning, Part 1 of the sermon focused on the growing pains of "being" on the individual level. Our Philippians passage invited us all into a self-examination process of how you and I might embody the charge of Paul; to live our life in the image of Christ.

This message today will invite us to consider how we are called to collectively live together as Christ would call us to live.

The idea is that once we work on ourselves in "being" like Christ (Part 1 message); each Christ like individual coming together, will then be able to form the ideal Church of Jesus Christ.

And for some, it may be tempting to suggest that if everyone focuses on themselves individually into "being" like Christ, then living together in community as a church; should be relatively easy right?

Well, I think we know the answer to this.

Because I submit that even with the most well intentioned, Christ like and minded people coming together; **there will still be challenges.**

For just as on an individual level, when you and I begin to live our lives in the image of Christ, **there will still be** challenges that come up in our personal lives; family issues, grief, loss, trials and disruptions; **on a larger level, there will still be challenges** that come up against us as it pertains to the

church; that being Christ like alone will not be able to fix. Now being Christ like I submit, **will allow us to** see different perspectives of our situations, thereby helping us to move our metaphorical mountains from here to there; as scripture tells us faith in Jesus can do. (Matthew 17:20)

However, being Christ like will not unfortunately **remove those challenges altogether.**

It would be great if it worked that way.

In my experience it does not.

In fact, as I reflect on my own spiritual journey, it seems like the more I delved into God's Word and focused all my efforts towards ministry, the challenges around me sometimes **even turned up a notch.**

For it was in seminary where my oldest daughter's tumor was diagnosed.

It was after ordination where my dad's pancreatic cancer took him from us.

It was my faith in God that did not remove these challenges, but my faith is what helped me to get through these challenges.

Furthermore, as we turn to our gospel today, there is a another challenge that is emerging within this passage that is not entirely explicit, but it is implied.

And the challenge for the chief priests and the elders in our passage, that I would imagine would be the same challenge for a lot of the people in the world we live in today, is with one little **seemingly harmless word** on the surface; that we all know holds a lot of power;

A word that wars have broken out over;

A word where I have witnessed with my own eyes, people like crabs in a barrel trying to keep other crabs from reaching the top to attain it;

The word that is posing a challenge for many in our gospel today that I am talking about is **authority.**

Authority defined to help our conversation along, means the power or right to give orders, make decisions, and enforce obedience.

Or authority also means as it pertains to a larger organization; a person or organization having power or control in a particular, typically political or administrative, sphere.

Either way **having authority** is a close runner up from my perspective, to having money; as far as being one of the most desired positions for most to be in.

For sometimes **having authority** for some can trump having money, because when a person has authority, they have the

power to affect many lives at the same time.

This is why **having authority** (as I am certain we might all tend to agree) placed into the wrong hands, can be catastrophic and destructive.

Having authority placed into the wrong hands is why in this country I propose, we are witnessing a synergistic effort across the country to make sure that this does not happen.

For authority placed into the wrong hands could ruin a lot of people's lives.

Authority placed into the wrong hands could essentially and potentially **end a lot of lives**.

Furthermore this **challenge of authority** is at the heart of all of the divineness that surrounds this world as it pertains to government and human relations from my perspective.

The challenge of authority can be seen even in our own churches amongst leadership and even ministries;

The challenge of authority is why I believe we are still in this pandemic crisis; for the question of freedom is often a looming question and concern for most of us if not all of us, if we are honest.

The challenge of authority is everywhere; from the grocery products on the shelves, to the clothing in department stores, from the commercials we see on television, to the electronics that we are investing in;

There is some embedded authority that drives us to buy what we buy, think what we think, wear what we wear, believe what we believe....

This church family; **this is why** our chief priests and elders are so enraged at the sight of Jesus and all of his declarations.

This is why I submit, the same Jesus was crucified, left to bleed out onto the cross.

Because Jesus dared to name himself as being the ultimate **authority**; and **for some** who was used to having similar authority; **for some** who have been used to abusing their authority; they were not ok with it one bit.

They were not ok with this Jesus and his ministry **that proclaimed that he had the authority** to set the captives free and bind up the broken hearted.

They were not ok with this **Jesus whose ministry proclaimed the authority** to forgive the sins of humanity and allow us all to enter into a holy, sacred moment of baptism; as a sign of this forgiveness and a beginning of a new way forward in God.

So **it is this authority church**, that I only scraped the surface of within this message; that challenged the chief

scribes and elder in particular.

And Jesus response was to tell a parable of two sons; a parable that on the surface was very intimidating for me to even engage at first, because it seemed disjointed and out of place to me.

However, it was when I placed this parable **in terms of authority**; that the parable became clearer to me and perhaps the way I am inviting us to engage it will also resonate on some level with you.

Because essentially the way I am seeing this parable play out, is for us as the larger church to consider, which son we are striving to be.

Are we going to be the first son, who initially said that he would not go to the vineyard and work as his father asked him to do, but then changed his mind and went anyway?

Or will we be the second son, who said that he would go and work in the vineyard, but then never went?

To frame these questions in ways that might perhaps fit our ministerial context; will we as a church make the effort to share God's Word and love for all; will we extend ourselves to areas and initiatives that might stretch us out of our comfort zones;

Will we take on the charge of helping those to stand who may not be able to stand?

Will we challenge the broken systems that are the antithesis of God's love and Word?

Or will we remain the church in name only and nothing more?

Will we stay silent in the midst of injustice?

Will we turn our heads away in acts of violence, or dismiss them altogether?

Will we become desensitized to all of the evil and injustice because we have resolved that the matter is out of our hands anyway?

Which son will we choose to be Church?

These are questions that I will not attempt to answer for us;

But what I will ask us to consider in this parable is this;

What is the role of the father in our parable?

The one thing that is not debatable in this parable I am pretty certain, is that you and I are witnessing a family unit being described in this parable; a father and two sons.

And I don't know about you church, but in my home, Steve and I have the authority in our home.

We have the authority because we are the parents....Amen somebody!

We have the authority, because we are the providers of our family; we are the only one paying bills up in our home and as

a side note; I can't wait until someone other than Steve and I begin to pay some bills up in this house!

We are good parents, loving parents, wise parents and we owe this all to the main authority in our home;

For as for me in my house, we will serve the Lord. (Joshua 24:15)

For God is who we aspire to be the head of our household.

And **this is not** because we are holier than thou people; because **we are not**;

This is not because we are saints ourselves; because **we are not**.

But you see Steve and I have been guilty of placing our authority in other hands; **the wrong hands in our lives**;

And let's just say, the outcome wasn't too pretty for us.....

This is why we emphatically say through trial and error, that as for me in my house, we will serve the Lord.

And so it is with this same personal awareness that I submit to us as the church, **to consider the role of the father in our parable as a church**;

For the father in this parable is parallel to the triune God in our spiritual faith; God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, placing the authority in God's hands, I believe we can not go wrong;

For like in our first lesson of Psalm 78; in **placing the authority into God's hands**, we will be able to see the works of God and marvel at God's works of the land .

Placing the authority into God's hands will allow us to pass through the metaphorical seas of any challenges we might encounter.

Placing the authority into God's hands will make the waters of evil stand like a heap.

Placing the authority into God's hands will lead us through the clouds and guide us all night long with a fiery light for justice.

It will split rocks open in this wilderness of oppression and hatred and give us drink abundantly as from the deep;

It will make streams of God's righteousness come out of the rock and cause the waters of our united love to flow down like rivers;

Allowing us all to rejoice in the land of the kingdom; a kingdom vastly rich and diverse;

A kingdom flowing with milk and honey;

A kingdom where we all might live in harmony together; with the assurance that we are all where we are supposed to be.

This is what happens when we **place the authority in God's hands** church; Our Rock our Redeemer.

Where every knee will bow and tongue will confess that
Jesus Christ is Lord;
Oh Give ear, O my people, to the Lord's teaching;
incline your ears to the words of the Holy One's mouth.
Let the people of God say Amen!

Sincerely,

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