

Sunday July, 17, 2022  
First Lesson: Colossians 1: 15-28  
Gospel Lesson: Luke 10: 38-42  
Sermon Series: Growth Effect  
Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

**We are beginning a new sermon series called “The Growth Effect.” This is a series designed to examine the progress that we have made as a result of our many weeks spent on both the Pruning Effect and Spiritual fruit Effect sermon series.**

- So let’s talk about what is growth for a few moments?
- So in looking up the definition of growth which I am certain we all know what it means; however I think it is helpful for us to always have the definition before us, to assist us in this evolving conversation; according to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, **growth means a stage or condition in increasing, developing, or maturing.**

- Now in some instances in applying this definition to our everyday lives, it is relatively easy for you and I to measure growth.
- For instance, back in March of 2017, my husband and I did a lot of planting of trees.
- This is because when we first moved into our home, there was no grass...the land was pretty much a mess.
- So I would like to show you one of the trees that we planted on the screens on the left, which is very difficult to really see, but what you can make of it...you can see the tree was very tiny. The other two trees were not yet planted at all at that time until possibly the following year ;
- Nevertheless you can easily see how on the right, how much the tree has grown.
- As a side note, I just took this picture yesterday.
- And the reason why I tend to take pics of our trees and plants, is because no matter how closely I try

to monitor the growth and progress of our trees and shrubs and plants, it can be easy to forget how far they have come along.

- Sometimes, I can get so caught up in life, ministry and more, that these details can escape me.
- And so as the old adage states, **that a picture is worth a thousand words;**
- My taking these pics, reminds me of the growth and progress that Steve and our family are making in our yard.
- However, using this story that I shared as a working modern day parable for where we will go over these next few weeks in this sermon series, I would be remiss if I did not name that sometimes it can be difficult to measure growth from the spiritual aspect...can I dare get an Amen or a head nod.
- I said sometimes it can be difficult to measure if those fruits that we have been talking about for a

while now, out of Galatians 5: 22-23; of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, **23** gentleness, and self-control—sometimes it is not easy to see if we have made growth in these areas both on an individual and collective level.

- For example, I am currently serving on the Creative Arts District Board, that started as a collaboration between myself representing our Church community of First UMC, Nebraska Wesleyan University, Lux Art Center and more, with the intention of making the University Place an official Creative Arts District in Lincoln, Nebraska, similar to the Haymarket area downtown that has already been established for some time.
- However, for us to be able to do that, it involves us being able to come together and measure somehow the growth and possibilities that our

Northeast neighborhood has to offer, which is something that is not as easy as one may think.

- So our collaborative approach as a board, will be to hold Creative SWOT events in strategic places, one of them being our Church, which is already on the calendar for Sunday, October 2 after church downstairs in Black Fellowship Hall @ 12:30.
- So SWOT is an evaluative tool to measure essentially growth opportunities within any infrastructure, business, community and more.
- SWOT stands for (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats)
- It is an analysis used to set the framework for and to help evaluate a [company's competitive position](#) and to develop strategic planning in reaching its fullest potential.
- **A SWOT analysis is designed** to facilitate a realistic, fact-based, data-driven look at the

strengths and weaknesses of an organization, initiatives, or within its industry.

- **A SWOT analysis** helps keep an accurate and fuller potential of what the organization's potential really is.
- It avoids pre-conceived beliefs or gray areas and instead focuses on real-life contexts.
- So this is a long way of naming that in our Church Community, we have a great possibility before us, that will hopefully allow us to continue to thrive for 134 years more of ministry and then some, by taking the time to measure our own growth effect and potential, when we partner together with our neighbors.
- Furthermore, this event in October, in which more details will be provided as the date comes closer, will allow us to apply this SWOT tool to our own community and surrounding neighborhood.

- There will be food, anticipated music, networking and transformational discussions and more.
- In many ways this tool will fuel the adage that I mentioned earlier, this idea **that a picture is worth a thousand words.**
- Entering into these types of partnering conversations and strategic planning, **will allow us to keep the mental picture** in our minds and hearts, that informs us that we do have something great to offer **in this community;**
- That there is still much life **in this community;**
- That failure is not an option when it comes to living and coexisting **in this community;**
- Which reminds me of the Book of Ezekiel chapter 37 vs 3, when the text asks, “Son of man, can these bones become living people again?”

Ezekiel’s response, “O Sovereign Lord,” I replied, “you alone know the answer to that.”

- I stopped by to declare by the Spirit of the Lord, **I think we know the answer to that!**
- For God's response to Ezekiel was to say, 'Dry bones, listen to the word of the Lord! **5** This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Look! I am going to put breath into you and make you live again!
- Which is a long way of suggesting that as I bring the First Lesson more directly into our conversation today,
- Where verse 23 reminds us as I paraphrase it just a bit, that providing that we **continue** to securely be established and steadfast in our faith and love for this community that we live in and love, **without shifting from the hope** promised by the gospel that we have heard;



- Then The Holy Spirit will continue to (now I am back in the Ezekiel text) **breathe life into us and this community;**
- Which lets us know that **growth is happening.**
- **You and I just have to be willing** to be able to see it.
- **You and I just have to be willing** to take the time to reflect upon it.
- **You and I just have to willing** to take the time to live into it;
- All which is not going to be easy, **but that does not mean that growth is not still possible and attainable.**
- For again, it is easier for us to see how much a tree has grown.

- The other parts in our lives, we will have to be open to doing the work, to help bring this growth effect and potential into a crisper focus.
- For growth looks differently for example when you or I may be trying to assess whether or not we are making strides in our mental health journeys.
- For with mental health it can be difficult to measure growth.
- Furthermore growth in this instance typically is measured by progress.
- Furthermore tools that can help measure that progress are things such as therapy, medication, spiritual direction and counsel and simply doing the hard work of self assessment; that involves us asking ourselves questions.

- Questions of, Do I feel less depressed today than I did yesterday? Was I able to get out of bed today? Was I able to complete my day to day tasks easier today? And if the answer is yes...then that is growth...that is progress!
- **Growth in say for instance** with school, could be measured in terms of progress as well; grades, activities, having healthy interactions with peers and teachers and so forth.
- **Growth when it comes** to our relationships with one another, can be evaluated by a myriad of tools that require some level of us individually having a healthy emotional quotient/EQ, that allows us to reflect upon how we interface with one another and holds us accountable for the impact that our behaviors have on one another.

- So again, I invite us to continue to look at the areas in our lives and communities, with the idea of discerning **how we can keep that mental picture within our hearts and minds** of how growth is occurring within us and around us.
- This past Wednesday, in our *Applying to Sermon to Life Class*, in which I am pleased to name that now youth have come to this class as well, together we examined the stories of our scriptural, lessons to identify themes of growth.
- In the first lesson of Colossians, where the Apostle is dealing with the full adequacy of Christ. First the apostle stresses the person of Christ and the unique status of said person, and later the apostle stresses the work of Christ in the world and in the Church.

- Themes of growth that the group identified in this lesson that could speak to our lives was in verse 21, that several of the group named as teaching us what happens when you and I do not invest in our spiritual growth.
- We become estranged even hostile in our minds, which leads many of us to stray away from our spiritual fruits and all of its potential.
- Some of the group named that what keeps a lot of us stuck in this spot of estrangement is because we are distracted.
- **We tend to be distracted** by societal expectations and standards, that keeps us sometimes from having the courage to live out our spiritual fruits.
- Some of us even named this idea that the societal pressures and standards is sometimes all that we really tend to know.

- Many of us were taught and raised with this idea that this is simply what we are supposed to do.
- An example of this, I have had many discussions with some of our church family about race relations and why racial tension is still so prevalent.
- Stories that have been shared with me reflected this idea that growing up, persons of color were not typical for some of their life experiences or if persons of color were there, it was normative for segregation to be a part of the culture.
- It was just the way things were.
- So that got me thinking;
- Many of you have lived during the Civil rights era and more...I on the other hand just read about it...  
**but you were there!**

- **Some of you were there** when John F. Kennedy was assassinated.
- **Some of you were there** when Dr. King, Malcolm X and other leaders for justice and racial harmony were assassinated.
- Some of you were there...you lived it!
- Which is why I really love being a part of this community, because knowing that **you were there**, and seeing the fact that **you are still here**...can I dare say that this is the growth effect in action for all of us!
- **The fact that you are still here** and willing to grow and learn in this new age of diversity on every level of music, culture, people, food, traditions, beliefs and more...**I celebrate that you are still here...that we are all here... and we are in this together!**

- **Which then brings our gospel into a more fuller perspective,**
- For our group gained a lot of energy and discussion around Mary and Martha;
- For this is a familiar gospel for most.
- These two sisters are such vivid examples of two personality types that it is impossible to forget them or their names.
- For Mary was by nature an introvert, Martha an extrovert.
- Mary was a meditative mystic many scholars identified.
- Martha was a practical provider, hustling and bustling about, hurried and flurried and worried.
- These two sisters saw things through different eyes.



- Making the million dollar question that our group wrestled with and I invite you to continue to discern for yourself is this; “Which one of these sisters demonstrated more spiritual growth?”
- For a lot of our group identified with Martha.
- For remember when I talked about meeting the societal expectations and standards....that was the epitome of Martha all day!
- For in Martha’s eyes, it would have been improper for her house not to be in order, especially with Jesus of all people being there?
- A couple of our youth asked the question, if Jesus was really invited, or was he an unexpected guest?
- For the text said that Martha welcomed Jesus, but the text does not really indicate if this was a planned dinner.

- Nevertheless, **Martha received him into her house.**
- This suggests that Martha was the older sister and perhaps owned the home.
- She may have been married; probably Mary was not.
- Mary **sat at the Lord's feet, and heard his word** (v. 39). **But Martha was preoccupied about getting the details in order** (v. 40).
- These two brief statements pinpoint the differences in personality.
- Mary was quiet and receptive.
- Martha was busy and outgoing.
- Mary was more keenly aware of the supreme value of feasting spiritually at the Lord's feet,

- For Martha, Mary may have been somewhat remiss in her duty of helping her sister.
- And to Martha's credit, perhaps Mary should have been paying some attention to helping out in the kitchen, as well as listening to Jesus as intently as she could.
- At any rate, Martha became more and more disconcerted. Instead of scolding her sister she scolded Jesus! "Why don't you tell my sister to help me?" For Martha was probably too disgusted with her sister to speak to her. But in her hasty anger or impatience she said something of which she must have been heartily ashamed afterward. For I am a bold personality myself, but I don't think I could ever talk to Jesus that way!
- Either way Jesus response towards her was, "Martha, why are you so worried and distracted by

many things, there is need of only **one thing**. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.”

- Here at First UMC of Lincoln, we are striving to capture the picture of that **one thing** that really matters in the midst of many things;
- Week to week, our groups that meet both in person and online, are trying to capture that **one thing**, that might make the Earth flourish because our feet has kissed it;
- We are striving to name and glean from **that one thing**, that captivated Mary so much so, that she was able to dismiss the glaring stares from her sister;
- I don't know about you but I want to learn the art of seeing that **ONE THING**, that made Mary even be

able to step away from the societal pressures that keeps so many of us estranged;

- God help us discover that **ONE THING** that connects the kin-dom on Earth that might scrape the surface of what the kin-dom of heaven could be like;
- I want us to master that **ONE THING** that softens hardened hearts and ceases us from striking out towards one another;
- We as a people I submit, need to take the time to discover that **ONE THING** that holds us together, that links us together, that echoes this idea that there are six degrees of separation, **that really connects us together;**
- **That connects our** human experiences,
- **That inspires our** human traditions,

- **That continues to challenge** the fiber of our limited but ever seeking and searching human reasoning;
- **That is captured** in this ancient text, that whether we all believe in it or not, the Word of God as of date is still the most challenging, captivating, controversial, inspiring, hope filled, puzzling, transformative written work that this world has ever seen and most likely will ever see;
- Will you continue to seek this ONE THING that is the MAIN THING that I can just sense is THE THING, that will really matter when it is all said and done...will you do this and most importantly can we do this together?
- Oh Lord may the Holy Spirit breathe Words from my mouth, and the thoughts from our collective hearts, both in this physical space and virtually

online, be acceptable in your sight.... Let the  
Church say Amen!