

Sunday July 31, 2022  
First Lesson: Colossians 3: 1-11  
Gospel Lesson: Luke 12: 13-21  
Sermon Series. Growth Effect  
Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

**We are continuing with our 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 the immediate question that comes to my mind, that I think is worth exploring together; when looking at our two lessons today, is the question of, **“How do we know that growth is happening?”**
- How can you and I tell if growth is happening in our individual lives?
- How can you and I tell if growth is happening on a collective level?

- Another way of asking this question is, “How can you and I tell if things are improving in our day to day situations?”
- And so the reason why I am asking these questions in this particular manner is because if you and I were to take our First lesson at face value, the assumed writer Paul of our text this morning of Colossians, seems to be assured, that growth is possible for this community, if they were to simply focus on the mission of Jesus Christ.
- For verse 1 says, *So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds in things that are above, not on things that are on Earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.*

- Therefore, if I were to place these scriptural sentences into my own words, Paul is essentially inviting this community and the reader of today to consider, that if we set our minds on the things that Christ is concerned about, then growth is inevitable.
- Paul is saying that if you and I were to focus our lives, our desires, our wants, our expectations on the things that truly matter to Jesus' mission, **then this in itself** is growth. **This in itself** is progress.
- However, as simple as what Paul is saying **may seem to be on paper**, I think we all know that applying this concept to our lives is that much more difficult.
- For think about it, I would suggest that the average reasonable person, is mostly concerned with the things that affect their own individual silos that we know to be our lives.

- And we see what I am naming play out in Luke 9, where if you remember how Jesus was trying to gather disciples who were willing to follow him;
- Where instead of Jesus receiving a yes upon his request, instead he received pushback, even excuses, as to why some of the disciples could/ would not follow Jesus right away.
- One of the disciples said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” **60** And Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” **61** Another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” **62** And Jesus said to him, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”
- Jesus makes it clear that although these circumstances are important to us per se, they are not the ultimate priority or even main focal point for God.

- For according to Paul in our text today, he is saying that there are no fringe benefits outside of Christ.
- For the Christian life is not simply deliverance from something, **but deliverance to something.**
- Which further means that not only are we not to engage in former practices, but on the contrary, we are to actively engage in thought and work, consistent with this new life in Christ Jesus.
- And I don't know about you, but this idea that there could be something more pressing, than what our daily lives and obligations calls for, is something quite difficult to wrap my head around.
- It is perhaps just as difficult as for instance Martha in our gospel who we studied about a few weeks ago, **to ask of her to lay aside** the daily tasks of what needed to be done in her house, to make her house presentable, so that she could be like her sister Mary, and simply sit at Jesus feet.

- For I couldn't fathom there being anything more important than having safety, security and love for the ones that inhabit my household day to day.
- However, as my father's anniversary of death is approaching quickly, August 3rd, in which he would be gone from this Earth due to pancreatic cancer for 8 years;
- I remember witnessing that as his own death was approaching near, that he began to get that far away look into his eyes, where suddenly he was not too concerned with what was going on in the day to day world.
- It was quite strange and miraculous to witness, **my father having no concern** of what for example the temperature was outside, or what we would all eat that evening, as he was the parent who always cooked— so my dad was always concerned about what we wanted to eat.

- However, when his time was coming near, the look in my dad's eyes seemed to be focused on a bigger picture, that I could not quite see as he did, but I undoubtedly trusted was there and real.
- **And so you see, I believe that this idea of something bigger beyond ourselves, can also be seen in our gospel today.**
- For typically when someone learns that their time is coming near, to depart from this Earth, there is this tendency for that person **to want to get their affairs in order.**
- Therefore, I think that was the impetus in some regards, of what was undergirding our gospel this morning;
- Where a man in the crowd asked Jesus, to order his brother to divide the family inheritance with him.
- You see in my mind, although I have heard this passage preached in a myriad of ways, I cannot

criticize this man's request of Jesus too much, simply because this is what we as humanity tends to be concerned with, in matters of life and death.

- For most of us are taught to be concerned with getting our affairs into order, mainly so that our loved ones who are left behind, may not have to struggle as much.
- And part of how we strive to get our affairs into order, is we typically devise a plan or a will, for how we wish to allocate our belongings.
- Therefore, I stopped by to suggest that what we are witnessing is very relatable.
- For when a loved one passes away, there is typically a lot of discussion on what happens to the loved ones' assets; in particular inquiring minds want to know who those assets goes to upon their death.
- This is a reality that I have observed time and time again, for I have been blessed to officiate at least

50 funerals or more in my time, and in all of those instances, let's just say that I have heard the division of assets come up more than a dozen times in a conversation.

- However, Christ's reply to this man inquiry about the assets was: **Who made me a judge or a divider over you?**
- Then Jesus took advantage of the situation to deliver a strong warning against **covetousness; the desire for material wealth.**
- **At the same time Jesus** also enunciated a great general principle; to name that **a person's life consists not in the abundance of things which one possesses.** For material possessions do not mean abundant life.
- In fact I have heard preacher's in my day echo this statement by declaring in the pulpit, that when we all die, **you cannot take a U-haul with a hearse, although some of us may try;**

- On some level I suspect we all know this to be true..don't we?
- We intuitively know that when we die, that none of these details will really matter.
- Perhaps this is the true meaning of Matthew 6:25 where Jesus says, "That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing?"
- And so I'll say it again, **on paper** this all makes sense, doesn't it?
- **On paper, in our gospel, it makes sense**, why this man shouldn't store up his surplus;
- **On paper, it makes sense**, that like in our First lesson of Colossians, we should set our minds on the things above;
- So why then does it become so difficult to apply to life, what makes so much sense on paper?

- And this is when the aha moment for me comes, to be able to identify how you and I can know when we are truly growing.
- It is when we begin to set our minds to explore the life application that I have been naming;
- You and I can know that we are growing, when we are able to actively live into what I coined last week, to be these Mary Moments.
- You see Church, growth is when you and I are able to metaphorically sit at Jesus' feet, and learn how to live beyond the confines of our individual silos or bubbles, to really take a look at this kingdom and examine our role and contribution to it.
- And I tell you this week as I served as the Spiritual Director at Camp Chippewa out in Ottawa KS, I think we all experienced a powerful growth opportunity as a new formed community.

- For I need to give a proper shout out to the director of this camp, James Rickner who set this vision into motion.
- **For just as** our own Church community of Lincoln, has gone through some powerful growth spurts, as we have begun to make space for more diversity and inclusion in every way possible, **and just as** the Great Plains Annual Conference, has made space for diversity and inclusion that we witnessed a few weeks ago, when Martha Gadberry and John Lee gave their report; let's just say that this Camp was about to experience the growth effect **whether we all knew it or not...** **whether we all liked it or not,** growth was happening **and it was happening now!**
- For James took a leap of faith on a very limited staff due to Covid, and ran not just one camp, but two camps at the very same time.

- And as if that was not chaotic enough, the main tension that existed, that washout to come to a head, was that the one camp known as Leadership Institute that includes the CCYM, Conference Council on Youth Ministry, was the only camp that has been around for over 100 years, until now.
- At the same time, this camp has traditionally not been very diverse in its staff or campers.
- It is important to also name that The Leadership Institute was held roughly 30 miles away from where we were.
- For the camp that I was tasked to be the Spiritual Director of, was on the camp grounds of Camp Chippewa.
- And so what made things let's just say even more interesting, was that when I was invited to lead this camp, I was told that it would be geared towards urban kids.

- But let's just say it really didn't click to me what they meant by urban, for I have been in this conference a long time, and to be honest, I have learned that the word urban is not the same for everyone.
- So when they said urban, in my mind I was thinking youth from larger surrounding cities, but for some reason, I did not anticipate this equating to diversity.
- However Steve and I quickly realized that urban equated to the inner cities of primarily Kansas City youth and their leaders who are African American.
- So here we all were, over 65 youth and their leaders/sponsors, all who were African American, mainly from the Baptist denomination or unchurched altogether. For it was amazing in some of the pictures where you saw me serving Communion, a lot of the youth never experienced Holy Communion until that moment.

- Then combine this group with a Caucasian leadership/worship team and myself all who were from the Methodist denomination;
- So if I can be candid with you, day one with these campers and sponsors **was a disaster.**
- **It was a disaster,** because all of the music that was shared with this community, was not from their worship contexts.
- **It was a disaster,** because there were also some male pastors who did not affirm women preaching in the pulpit. In fact, on day one, although I was asked to bring a message every night, these pastors immediately wanted to take over two of those nights.
- **It was a disaster,** because the youth were not responding well to all of the chaos that was going on; they talked through every message, bible study, worship opportunity and more;

- **It was a disaster**, because all of us were out of our comfort zones. There was even a point where I told James I was leaving the camp, that I did not sign up for any of this!
- But then that still small voice within me let me know, “You may not have signed up for any of this, but I signed you up for all of this!”
- And so I stayed, and by God’s grace, I empowered the leadership team with the conference staff, to explore other worship styles, so that these youth and their leaders could connect.
- And I have to say that I thank God for Malcom, Alicia, Leila and this entire worship community of First, for how we ultimately survived this experience, was from everything that we are doing here at First.
- For I recalled all of the songs that worked in our worship setting, and applied it the next few nights

in worship at Camp Chippewa, in which it was a success.

- Steve and I also made it our business to really step out of our own boxes and love on each and every one of the campers, conference staff and even the leaders and pastors that came from the Kansas City areas; by getting to know their story.
- At the same time, we made space to have those difficult conversations surrounding our denominational differences, theology and more, to come to some sort of common ground together, for the sake of these youth, who desperately **needed to see us come to a place of common ground.**
- And the result is that we all were renewed and transformed in that space.
- **Suddenly, the worship leaders** from Kansas City and the conference team were leading worship together;

- **Suddenly**, on night 3 of our time together, youth were leading worship and a couple even expressed a call to pastoral leadership;
- **Suddenly young girls** were coming up to me sharing that they did not know that women could become pastors, in which made space for me to empower them that not only could they become pastors, but by God's grace, these same girls shared in one of our worship nights their own stories.
- **Suddenly**, even the male pastors who may not have initially affirmed women in the pulpit, seemed to find value in how God was using my gifts and graces with the youth and adult leaders.
- **Suddenly**, I was given an honorary horse shoe worn from one of those beautiful horses that Steve and I was blessed to ride with the High School camp with the invitation to come and lead all of the camps both Stephen and myself; for the

entire summer. I shared that I would gladly accept the horseshoe but that they would have to arm wrestle our Church of First UMC to allow both Steve and I to be loaned to them for so long!

- **This is a long way of my naming church that suddenly,** I could feel that growth was happening in all of us.
- You know although I was not able to be at our classes here on Wednesday night, the theme that I was told that our own community found reassuring, is this idea that renewal is made possible when we allow ourselves to grow.
- And so as I reflect one last time from this camp experience, I have to declare that although that was one of the most uncomfortable, difficult weeks of my life to date, **I am so glad** that it happened.
- **I am so glad** that this growth happened within all of us;

- **I am so glad** that we get to be in a community like First, who is doing the hard work of this growth, **that then allows us to teach others** how to embrace this type of growth in their own lives;
- **I am so glad that** the growth potential that we have been talking about, cannot be stored up like the man in our gospel wanted to do with his grain;
- For this type of growth **is a surplus** that cannot and should not be contained.
- **It is this type of growth**, that aids us into becoming new and transformed and renewed in ways that our limited minds cannot even imagine;
- So that we all can transform into thy kingdom come, thy will be done on Earth as is in heaven!
- Dr. Spilker shared a powerful quote from the class experience from Sonya Renee Taylor that says, *We will not go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-corona existence was never normal other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion,*

*depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate and lack. We should not long to return, My friends. We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment. One that fits all of humanity and nature.*

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- Folks this is the Growth Effect potential in all of its glory and infinite possibilities.
- Let the Church say Amen!