

Transforming Meridian Street
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January 7, 2018

Ephesians 3:1-12 (NRSV)

This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— for surely you have already heard of the commission of God’s grace that was given me for you, and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God’s grace that was given me by the working of his power. Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

For the most of my ministry, every January I have spent a couple of weeks looking at the mission and vision of the church and doing my best to remind you of it and of its importance.

In case you have forgotten ----

Meridian Street exists for only one reason: TO MAKE DISCIPLE FOR JESUS CHRIST.

And we have defined that universal mission of the church by saying: Through Christ we seek to grow in faith as we serve, love and share God's unexpected grace

We make disciple with the goal of transforming the world with the love of Jesus.

That is our sole purpose.

The question that every church struggles with --- certainly that we struggle with --- is

How do we do that?

And what does it look like?

10 years ago or so, the leadership of Meridian Street wrestled with that question and over the last few years was able to clarify by vision with the statement:

We desire to be "Communities thriving and growing in the fruit of the Spirit".

The problem, really has been, we have often looked to prescriptions to try and do those things ---
- become representatives of the fruit of the spirit, (in case you have forgotten what those fruit are: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control), rather than go back to the beginning.

And the beginning starts with ME --- it starts with you

Being transformed ourselves into Disciples of Jesus Christ --- before we head out to save the world

I know it is risky for me to say this --- but I guess I have to trust you --- part of my journey is trying to be honest with myself --- and that means being honest with you . . .

But during the winter of 2014 I had a breakdown

Call it what you will ---

Emotional

Spiritual

It cut me to the core --- and for a time --- I did really well

But those demons have a strong hold on me

I believe I preached my most honest sermon that I have ever preached on February 15th, 2014.
(not that I remember that date!)

But even in it --- I was careful not to be too honest

You of course didn't get to hear it --- but it is on my blog site --- if you want to go back and read it

As I was working on my sermon for today --- it really hit me

It was a LIE

Not because what I preached wasn't true

It is probably one of the most truthful sermons I have ever preached

It was a lie because I failed to live it

I was that most horrible of persons who preaches:

Do what I say

Not what I do

And I have had to ask myself --- over and over again --- why didn't I practice what I preached?

Why did I give in to temptation and make other things more important than the truly important things.

I have wrestled many sleepless nights over this:

And I have come to the conclusion that I had been telling myself a lie

It is a lie that many of us, unfortunately, live by

One that is so extremely dangerous, because we don't even know that we believe it
It least not consciously

And the lie that I kept telling myself was:

I can't change

I didn't believe that I could actually change --- and if I didn't believe I could change --- there was no reason to even try!
And so I didn't

The demons inside continued to whisper to me --- "you can't"
And I BELIEVED IT

And believing that was a LIE

What I am starting to realize is that every healthy thing that God creates changes

Nothing that is truly alive stays stagnant

If it doesn't change --- it is dead (or at least dying)

And I was (am?) dying

I love to quote John Maxwell --- I have shared this with you before
Change is inevitable
Growth is optional

Instead of changing forward --- instead of growing --- instead of becoming the man God wants me to be --- I gave in to my demons and started dying

And the saddest part about it all

God gave me many warning signs that I often ignored

- I was hospitalized that year with severe case of vertigo
- My need to go back on the sleep apnea machine (which Nancy has been telling me over and over) And that I will do for a week or two and then stop . . .

My body calls out to me and too often I refuse to listen

I closed my ears and let the demons fill my head and soil my heart

I created a soundtrack to blot out the opportunities to grow healthy and instead chose to die slowly

So what does one do?

My first step in healthy transformation is REALIZING THAT I CAN GROW

I can change --- I can change
(it is a mantra that I must repeat)

In the greater scheme of things --- coming to that realization may be the easiest step of all --- but without it --- nothing will change

I must **believe** --- that I CAN CHANGE

The really hard part is looking inside and asking yourself the really tough questions --- the questions we all want to avoid

WHY --- Why do I refuse to change?

And the answer for me came in the most unlikely spot

As Nancy and I were preparing to go to New Zealand a few years ago we re-watched the Lord of the Rings trilogy. YES, it is long!!!! But well worth the effort.

In watching the videos, I realized something about me --- this is hard for me to confess . . .

I am very driven by other people's approval of me.

I crave it

What I mean by that is that if somebody doesn't think I am doing a good job, or challenges my motives --- or even quite simply just doesn't like me

I take it personally

(I don't imagine any of you have that problem)

I do my best not to let you know that I take it personally --- to let anybody know --- but I do --- it eats me up inside.

And it is crazy some of the ways that it manifests itself.

- those of you who haven't turned in your pledge cards --- yep, I take it personally
So lots of times I try to not know who that is, so I won't be hurt
- When somebody quits the church --- even though I KNOW it's not about me --- I take it personally

Crazy --- I know --- but that doesn't mean it's not real

When this happens, I become hurt, and angry and defensive

I don't like to admit that people affect me that way

But they do

Unfortunately, other people's opinions seem to matter a great deal to me (even if I pretend otherwise . . .)

I let them tell me who I am

It's crazy --- I know

But true

Don Miller on his blog wrote:

As I've grown older and read more and more about psychology, I've realized that, in part, this is by design. We really do shape our opinions about ourselves, in large part, through the opinions of others. It's as though we wear certain clothes and act a certain way and try to succeed at things so other people will tell us we are good or valuable. And when they do, we feel a little better about ourselves and when they don't, we start thinking we are losers

I am kind of slow

I have to say things over and over to myself to get them to sink in

This past fall I had the opportunity to hear Bob Goff.

The more I read his stuff --- the more I wish I could be like him

He is a lover!
A faithful lover!

He has extraordinary passion --- extraordinary love

Gosh, I wish I could have it . . .

But one thing that he constantly says is:
Don't let the past define you

Don't let others tell you who you are

I have told you that many times --- but I haven't believed it myself!

I have let my past
my fears
my insecurities
control me

They are demons who rejoice in me making the same mistakes over and over again.

I have to learn to listen to the RIGHT PEOPLE
And, maybe most importantly, I have to remember why I was created

- to love Jesus
- to love Nancy
- to be faithful to Nancy, Jessica, Lindsey and Haley

When I do those things --- the rest is pretty easy

But it all starts with **ME**

I have been seeking the love and adoration of YOU
And you have loved me more than I deserve

But when I have failed you --- and I have failed all of you somewhere along the way --- your hurt at my failure becomes magnified in my life in a crazy sort of way.

I have made the mistake in believing that your love --- that, other's love is what I need in my life to validate my worth.

So when I disappoint or let someone down --- I feel like a loser

And because I have been chasing approval from others --- I have failed to do the most important thing --- I have failed to love myself!

I have to learn --- we all have to learn --- how to really love ourselves!

Because, if we want to make a difference in the world we must first change ourselves!

Over the next few weeks we are going to look at how John Wesley transformed the world by changing himself.

If you haven't read Adam Hamilton's book REVIVAL --- which is all about Wesley and the transformation that took place in his life (and in the world) --- I encourage you to do so.

Paul in our text this morning reminds us that we have all be called

Called to change the world with the love of Jesus

It starts with ME

It starts with you.