

A New Spirit of Growth

Colossians 1:1-14

July 20, 21, 2019

Beargrass Christian Church

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. We have two weeks to go with the sermon series “A New Spirit.”
 - 1. We have thought about gratitude, peace, hope, and compassion.
 - 2. Today we will focus on the spiritual gift of growth.
- B. I know that there are questions about the authorship of Colossians, but for our purposes let’s call him “Paul.”
 - 1. The Apostle Paul recognized that just as there is a maturing process in life, there is also a maturing process in faith.
 - 2. This is a common theme in many of his letters.
- C. Do you recall some of his words?
 - 1. “I couldn’t speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as infants in Christ; I fed you milk, not solid food, for you weren’t ready.”
 - 2. “When I was a child, I spoke, thought, and reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways.”
- D. In Colossians Paul addresses this theme of spiritual maturation.
 - 1. Although we are reading “somebody else’s mail,” it is my hope that we will be able to cultivate and embrace these virtues.
 - 2. We are hearing more about virtual reality, but I invite you to consider the “virtue reality” that is seen in a Spirit-filled life.

II. WE ARE FAMILIAR WITH PHYSICAL GROWTH.

- A. Somewhere along the way we begin to be called “grown-ups.”
 - 1. I’m not sure what the number is—18, 21, 25, 30, 65—but it happens.
 - 2. And we celebrate the joy of adult responsibilities!
 - 3. But I wonder if...once in a while...some of us long to see the world again through the eyes of a child?
- B. That has been one of my blessings of being a grandparent.
 - 1. The triplets—the three wee kings—will be two on July 30.
 - 2. They have done so well since their very premature birth.
 - 3. They remind me of the simple joy of discovering new things.
 - 4. Chelsea and Brian amaze me because they keep track of it all.
 - a. “Aiden, good job! That’s the first time you’ve said that!”
 - b. “Bryson, good job! That’s the first time you have done that!”
 - c. “Theo, good job! That’s the first time you climbed up there!”
 - 5. Are there days when being a child again sounds great?
- C. A man asked his wife what she would like for her birthday.
 - 1. She sighed and said, “I would love to be 10 again.”
 - 2. So he started to plan for some special ways for her to celebrate.
 - a. On the morning of her birthday, he woke her up early.
 - b. He said: “Surprise!” I have a delightful day planned for you!”
 - 3. Trying to please her, he took her to a theme park.
 - a. Trying to please him, she cooperated.
 - b. What a day—they rode every ride in the place.
 - c. Five hours later, she staggered out of the park.
 - d. Her head was reeling...her stomach was in knots.
 - 4. The next stop was at McDonald’s for Kid’s Meals.

5. Then they went to the latest Spider Man movie.
6. Finally, they arrived back home around midnight.
 - a. She wobbled into the house and collapsed on the bed.
 - b. He leaned over and spoke lovingly and tenderly.
 - c. “Well, dear, what was it like being 10 again?”
 - d. She said: “You misunderstood me. I meant my dress size.”
- D. Unfortunately, that well-intentioned husband made a mistake.
 1. But would you like to be 10 again—for just a few hours?
 2. And yet we can’t—life keeps rolling and we are called and challenged to continue to grow and develop and mature.
- E. “Science News” reports how children, once thought to grow steadily, are now seen as growing in sporadic fits and starts.
 1. The growth is saltatory with abrupt jumps and spurts.
 2. Just prior to the spurts is fussiness, hunger, and sleepiness.

III. SO WHAT ABOUT OUR SPIRITUAL GROWTH?

- A. Could similar things happen with our spiritual life?
 1. Is spiritual growth sporadic, full of fitful starts and stops?
 2. And are there ways to measure our progress?
 3. How can we tell if people are growing in their faith?
 4. What kinds of “fruit” do we look for?
- B. The authors of the “Fresh Encounter” study share these thoughts.
 1. “What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit?”
 2. “It is complete surrender to God’s activity in our lives and divine empowerment to follow God’s commands.”
 3. “It is not a once-in-a-lifetime activity...but a daily filling by the Spirit in our lives...God’s hand is on everything we do.”
- C. So we hope to make progress and experience growth.
 1. God loves us as we are—but doesn’t want to leave us where we are.
 2. God wants us to become more and more like Jesus.
- D. C. S. Lewis expressed it this way:
 1. “It may be hard for an egg to turn into a bird—but it would be much harder for it to learn to fly while remaining an egg.”
 2. “We are like eggs at present—we must be hatched or go bad.”
- E. And yet, if we try to graph our growth we won’t see a straight line.
 1. Our journey will be full of twists, turns, trials and triumphs.
 2. The road will be full of disappointment, detours and delight.
- F. It is like the seeker who came to a saint for guidance.
 1. He asked: “Tell me, wise one, how did you become holy?”
 2. The saint said: “Two words.”
 3. He asked: “And what are the two words, please?”
 4. The saint said: “Right choices.”
 5. He asked: “And how does one learn to choose correctly?”
 6. The saint said: “One word. Growth.”
 7. The seeker asked: “But wise one, how does one grow?”
 8. The saint said: “Two words. Wrong choices.”
- G. So let us not be discouraged in our journey of discipleship!
 1. We will lose our way—lulls and logjams are to be expected.
 2. But we can’t remain stagnant—we continue to seek and search.

IV. THERE WILL BE SIGNS OF PROGRESS AND GROWTH.

- A. Paul proclaims this to the folks at First Christian, Colossae.

1. “We have heard of your faith and the love that you have.”
 2. “You have been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard the gospel and truly comprehended the grace of God.”
- B. Then he prays that they will lead lives worthy of the Lord, bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God.
1. He picks the fruits of wisdom, understanding, joy, strength, endurance, patience, gratitude, redemption, forgiveness!
 2. In these days when there is such moral depravity, wouldn’t it be great if more people lived out this “virtue reality?”
- C. But how can we tell if we are growing and making progress?
1. Physical things like height and weight we can measure.
 2. But recognizing spiritual growth is much more challenging.
 3. I can’t say: “Wow, you look much more spiritual this week!”
 4. Perhaps the fruits are seen in our actions and interactions?
- D. We can’t address all of the things in Paul’s letter, but maybe a few stories will help us think about what “virtue reality” looks like?
- E. A teacher had to attend a year-end elementary school band concert.
1. He writes: “As the director raised the baton, I sat back and for some reason expected to hear a beautiful symphony.”
 2. “To my shock, I heard instead a horrid cacophony of squeaks, honks, upbeat notes on the downbeat, and a miserable march.”
 3. “I grew impatient and I began to get up and walk out.”
 4. “And then I heard a gentle voice speak within me: ‘These are children; they are learning; they are doing very well.’”
 5. “The voice, of course, spoke truth, wisdom, patience.”
 6. “I was judging them according to my expectations, not accepting that they were all doing the best they could.”
 7. “At that moment, the music became lovely to me.”
 8. “I sat back and thoroughly enjoyed every remaining moment of the concert—and I think I cheered the loudest at its finale.”
- F. Some words from Frederick Buechner in a “A Room Called Remember” were written years ago—but remain relevant today.
1. “It is not great poetry, perhaps, and many a cynical word could be spoken about how the golden door that the Statue of Liberty lights with her torch turned out for many to be the door to a wretchedness greater than any they had left behind on the teeming shores of their homelands.”
 - a. “But I think the old words have power in them still, if we let them, to move us, to touch us close to where we live.”
 - b. “And the reason they have such power, I believe, is that one way or another they are words about us.”
 2. “Whether we’re rich or poor, whether our forebears came to this country on the Mayflower, a New England slave ship, a 19th-century clipper or in a jet, those huddled masses are part of who all of us are, both as individuals and as a people.”
 - a. “They are our fathers and mothers.”
 - b. “They are our common past.”
 3. “Yet it goes farther and deeper than that.”
 - a. “They are our past, and yet they are also ourselves.”
 - b. “In countless ways, we are the homeless and tempest-tossed, waiting on our own Ellis Islands for the great promise to be kept of a new world, a new life, which we haven’t yet found.”
 4. “We are the ones who yearn to breathe free.”
 - a. “We stand not merely like them but in a sense with them.”

- b. “And maybe it is only when we see that it is our own story that we can really understand either it...or ourselves?”
- G. Fifty years ago, over 530 million people around the world watched that first “small step” on the moon on their TV screens.
1. At the time it was the largest television audience ever.
 - a. Those of us who watched it knew history was being made.
 - b. It was so much greater than the one step, of course.
 - c. The human race had expanded to another world.
 2. Today less than 20% of Americans think we should go back.
 - a. I wonder if growing numbers realize Mother Earth needs some TLC.
 - b. More people are becoming aware that we are all passengers on a fragile planet.
 - c. We cannot arbitrarily separate ourselves from people or things we don’t like or folks with whom we disagree.
 - d. We are shareholders in the human condition—and we have far more in common than we will ever have differences.
- H. Finally, some of you are familiar with “Birdsong,” a selection of poems and prayers written by children in concentration camps years ago.
1. They have been circulating again because of current events.
 2. They are powerful expressions of hope and forgiveness and important virtues.
 3. One extraordinary prayer was left by the body of a dead child.
 4. “Dear God, remember not only the people of good will, but also those of ill will.”
 5. “But don’t remember the suffering they inflicted on us.”
 6. “Remember the fruits we have bought, thanks to this suffering—our comradeship, loyalty, humility, our courage, our generosity, the greatness of heart which has grown out of all this.”
 7. “And when they come to judgment...let all the fruits which we have borne...become their forgiveness.”
- I. How can anybody pray that kind of prayer?
1. How can anybody pray that their persecutors—even their murderers—be spared by the gains of grace caused by suffering?
 2. We cannot do it ourselves...this, too, is a gift from God.
 3. Maybe when I grow up...I can be like that child?