

“When We Get It Right”
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 Old Stone Presbyterian Church ~ Lewisburg, West Virginia
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Luke 16:10-13

¹⁰ “Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. ¹¹ If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? ¹² And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? ¹³ No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”

“Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much.”

In the last four weeks, we’ve been talking about Tom Berlin’s book, *Defying Gravity: Break Free from the Culture of More*. He’s helped us define financial gravity so out of sync that we are held back from faithfulness. We then explored what it would be to break free from those traps, and then what it means to be Tethered to God.

And this week, when we get it right.

It is an old saying that a preacher should prepare the sermon with a Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other. I do subscribe to this school of thought- to this theology- because I believe faith is relevant. I believe our faith in Jesus Christ is present and active and that God has something to say about how we live and the choices we make.

But is it just me, or does the news seem to be coming too fast and furious these days. And every story is huge. And faith implications abound

Last night, I checked the websites of Fox News, CBS, and the New York Times. There were stories about migrants coming to the United States from Honduras. The devastation of hurricane Michael, and how the strength of the storm was increased because of global climate change. The Presidents rally in Kentucky. The pastor who was released from Turkey. The Stock Market. The death, the killing, of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

Locally there is a company moving their plant, which will result in 130 jobs lost in Greenbrier County. A series of drug arrests.

And when I was in line at the Doctor’s office Wednesday morning I heard several other patients talking about hurricane Michael, and they were all in agreement, that God was sending this storm as a message. I was so floored by a theology that has God intending for a storm to sweep away the life of beloved mothers, fathers, and children, that I just didn’t know what to say.

Does it feel as overwhelming to you as it sometimes does to me?

Each of these headlines could be an entire sermon series.

Because while there are many things the Bible doesn't talk about, it talks quite a bit about how we treat the foreigner. How we love our enemies. What to do when we have plenty.

We don't have the option of looking away. Or ignoring.

What I'm tired of is always reacting, and I am ever more thankful that God may want the newspaper to be in my hand, but it is to that newspaper that we bring our faith- the newspaper does not define or dictate our faith.

It reminds me that when I feel swept away by the world, that my foundation, our foundation, is not this world, it is in Jesus Christ.

As St. Augustine wrote:¹

The river of time sweeps us on; but there, like a tree growing by the river, is our Lord Jesus Christ. He took flesh, died, rose again, ascended into heaven. He willed to plant himself as it were beside the river of things temporal. If you are drifting down to the rapids, lay hold of the tree: if you are caught up in the world's love, lay hold of Christ. He for your sake entered into time, that you might win eternity; for by his entering into time he did not cease himself to be eternal.

I don't have all of the answers for the problems facing the world, but I know one who will lead us through them, and points us to a better way. Jesus. And he's asking us to follow him.

This is one of the many things about stewardship season that I love. It is a time when we are reminded that God doesn't want us to react, God wants us to be proactive.

That to wait to see what the world is going to throw at you is a terrible way to live- it will only result in being pushed and pulled and knocked around.

If, instead, we practically plan deep roots in faith, tether ourselves to God, we can stay strong through storms, keep working to welcome God's kingdom, even when the headlines of the day seek to undo us.

Stewardship, stating how we will care of our time, our treasure, our resources, is a way we claim how deep we want our roots to go. It's a way to say who we are and whose we are.

It's like the classic object lesson, "Put the Big Rocks in First." I hope you've seen this done some place or some time.

¹https://books.google.com/books?id=UHCloahhtogC&printsec=frontcover&dq=augustine+later+works&hl=en&sa=X&ved=oahUKEwiumrntqo neAhUG7YMKHZiSC_QQ6AEIKTAA#v=onepage&q=276&f=false



It's an exercise where you have to decide what is important to you, most important. Those are the big rocks. And you have to put those rocks in first.

What happens if you don't do that, and you let life happen as it happens? Big and little going in as they find you? The big rocks don't all fit.

What are your big rocks, the rocks that can't be moved?

Your presence here tells me one of them. What are your others?

Stewardship season is a great time to ask yourself this question, and to talk with those who are closest to you about what you believe is important, and why, and how you are trying to live into it.

It's not always easy to keep those big rocks in place. Particularly if it's something new. If you are choosing generosity in a new way, maybe a way your family isn't used to.

In Family Systems Theory, whenever someone changes, it upsets the system and causes ripples throughout the system- people react and try and get you back to the way that you used to be.

A couple of calls, a couple of churches ago, there was a family in my congregation that was a blended family. Tom and Sally. Between them they had four children, and after the first couple of Christmases together this couple became aware that their kids were being inundated with too many presents. There were presents at their house. Presents at the houses of the other parents. There were presents from grandparents, now four sets of grandparents who had beautifully embraced these children as a part of their families.

Tom and Sally, sometime during the summer, decided that unless they were proactive, they weren't ever going to be able to change it. They told all of the children that from now on, at their house, Christmas morning wouldn't bring lots of presents to open, but that they would plan an experience, instead. That the "stuff" was just too much. They weren't telling any of the rest of the family not to give gifts, they were simply choosing it for their family.

At the time, the kids agreed. None of them were little, they were old enough to understand. But the mom told me, that first Christmas was brutal. As the reality of it sunk in. And she said at least one of the kids spent most of the day in her room, with her door slammed multiple times for affect.

They questioned themselves, of course, but Sally and Tom had really put thought into their decision, and knew it was the right one. It was what they needed for the faith development of their family. They stuck it out. And now, several years later, she says it was

one of the best things they ever did, to break free of the gravity of those gifts expectations. It opened them to a whole new way, a whole healthier way of being a family.

They were able to do it because they planned for it. Instead of reacting, they were proactive.

And isn't this the life of faith? Choosing to be a people of the word, people who believe it is important that we gather together. Learn together. Sing together. Hope together. Cry together. And plan to make it happen. Through generosity. Through stewardship of time.

Stanley Hauerwas puts it this way:²

Being a Christian should just scare the hell out of us. It's like on Sunday we need to rush together for protection. "Oh, I'm not crazy." That we believe that God was in Christ reconciling the world is craziness. It's going to make your life really weird. And you just need to get together on Sunday to be pulled back into the reality of God's kingdom.

Old Stone Presbyterian Church stands here as a testimony of a people who have gotten it right. A cloud of witnesses who are inviting us to do the same.

Reminding us that we can be like Lydia, who not only believes in Jesus, but brings an entire household to faith. We can be like Jacob, who wrestles the angel until a blessing is revealed. We can be like the widow, who gives all that she has. We can be like the Samaritan, who stops to help someone who he is told is unclean, because the man needed help. We can be like the Father, who ignores what the world tells him, and runs to welcome the Prodigal home.

Tom Berlin closes his book with these words:³

All of us can defy gravity. It doesn't take lots of money. It does take time. It takes sacrifice. It takes a shift in our view of the world. We must learn to see our lives as belonging to God.... God longs for us to experience a life in Christ that will make us generous in all ways, with our kindness, compassion, and love.... Such a life enables us to enjoy the pull of God's kingdom so that the spirit of God will be evident in our own.

Jesus is there, waiting for us to take hold. You're here. So, let's do just that.

"Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much."

Amen.

² "Sunday Asylum: Being the Church in Occupied Territory," page 81. First seen in this article: <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/ponderanew/2016/03/13/killing-the-church-with-sunday-school/>

³ Berlin, Tom. *Defying Gravity: Break Free from the Culture of More*. Abingdon Press, 2016. Page 102.