

Growing the Seeds of Love

Philippians 1:9-11

Don't confuse this morning's talk with the famous Tears for Fears song of the 80's "Sowing the Seeds of Love" but that song did inspire my title.

I have read the comment that one is either a Christian or they are not. One does not become more Christian over time. It's like being pregnant. Let's use an example of some we know who is pregnant...Irene. Over the last 7 months she has not become more pregnant. She was not less pregnant 7 months ago than she is today. She is looking more like she is pregnant but she has been pregnant since this child was first conceived.

But in the case of a child what is our hope as parents. That our child would grow. Our boys are growing fast and so is this baby inside Irene. If there was no growth then we would be concerned.

The same is true for farmers. They plant their seeds tend their fields and their desire is to see growth. If they plant their seeds and nothing happens for weeks on end there is great cause for concern.

Paul has expressed his joy toward the Philippians in the first 8 verses of this book in that they share Jesus in their lives and that they share with Paul in the work of spreading the gospel.

Paul now turns to his prayer for the Philippians. His prayer is based on this shared relationship with Jesus. The salvation that they have received, and us as well, is a free gift, there is nothing we can do to earn it. However, this salvation ought to energize us, we are called to act and it is through our obedience to act that we enter into the experience of what our salvation in Christ means to us.

What Paul is praying for is that the Philippians actively grow and he uses a harvest analogy to lay out how the growth occurs.

Our growth here is a growth into action. For a Christian, if we aren't growing we're drifting toward stagnation and indifference. Our mandate is to grow in knowledge and understanding. It's not just head knowledge but applying in practical ways what we have learned and know, to our daily lives. It's active.

So how does this growth occur?

First there is the seed. "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more..."

The seed is love. Not a love toward something but a love that fills our whole being and character. A love that prompts and marks our every attitude and action.

This love originates in God. It flows from the character of God, birthed in his heart and passed on into the lives of his children.

Through our salvation we have inherited the love of God. We do not have to earn this love or discover this love. When Paul writes in 2 Cor. 5:17 "...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: the old has gone, the new has come!" We have become new and a part of this new birthright is the inheritance of the love of God dwelling in us.

This new nature is already ours waiting to be expressed. And we don't want to forget about the love that is already in us. At times we give in and walk away in poor relationships. We assume divisions and arguments to be inevitable in the local church. We run away from the self-exposure and effort of reconciliation because it is painful. However if we tapped into the truth of the love of Christ, the most central thing of all, the most gentle and effective force for renewal we would realize that although it takes work we would be in effect acting grow in the seed of love already in us.

A young man with nothing exciting to do on a lazy summer day decided to go and vandalize a church. He entered the church sanctuary and began to mark up the pews with permanent markers. Then suddenly he heard the slamming shut of the entrance doors. Before he could run away, he found himself between a wall and the center aisle with the pastor standing in the way.

That pastor took the young man into the side chapel, where a figure of the crucified Jesus Christ hung on the wall. That pastor told the boy that the only other option to having him arrested was for the boy to repeat the following sentence ten times while staring at the figure of the crucified Christ: "I don't care that you died for me."

Then the pastor left the young man alone in the chapel to repeat the statement. The young man was rather relieved that he would not be arrested, and to humor the old pastor, he looked at the figure of the crucified Christ and began to repeat the sentence: "I don't care that you died for me. I don't care that you died for me. I don't care that you died for me"

And as the young man continued to repeat, "I don't care that you died for me," tears began to well up in his eyes, and soon he collapsed on the floor sobbing.

1 John 4:9-11 reads, "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

This young man was confronted with the love of God and it broke him. It broke through to the deepest recesses of his heart and convinced him that this love was something he needed.

This is the seed of love that is in us. A love that changes and transforms relationships; a love that forgives and reconciles; a love that restores and brings peace and joy.

This seed of love is not in us just to sit and be ignored and forgotten. It is to be lived out in our attitudes and our actions, otherwise it is meaningless.

We have heard the love passage in 1 Cor. 13 many times telling us what love is, "Love is patient, love is kind, it does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud, it is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth, It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails." (v. 4-8)

Imagine if this was the way we lived all the time. If this was our attitude toward everyone within this church as well as outside of this church. Conflicts would be short lived, Encouragement would abound, and the seats here would be overflowing because this is the love that the world is desperate for and we already have it, it is just waiting to burst out of us. But if I choose not to live a life of love then Nothing I say will matter, Nothing I know will matter; Nothing I believe will matter, Nothing I give will matter and nothing I accomplish will matter.

Love, it is the seed that lives deep inside of us waiting to be released through our actions and attitudes toward others. That's something we ought to be excited about.

So how do we grow this love? The shoots that form out of the seed are "...knowledge and depth of insight." (vs. 9)

Knowledge without love is cold and amoral, just data, but love without knowledge is not love, it's misguided emotionalism. The growth of our love is controlled and directed by our knowledge and discernment.

The knowledge that we are talking about here is knowledge of the things of God, religious, spiritual and theological.

Knowledge tells us the what, insight tells us the how and why. The first is about knowing, the second is about knowing what to do with the knowing. (I just like to say that). Paul wants this group of believers to take their newly found faith in Christ and educate it with Biblical truth.

The Bible – God has provided for us the truth to instruct us in knowledge about himself and Godly living. We are to do as the Psalmist encourages in Psalm 1, it says, "his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers." (vs. 2-3)

Do you delight in the Law of the Lord? Do you crack open your Bible with anticipation excited to see what God has to reveal to you today? I wonder if we have become apathetic in our reading of the Bible. I think we sometimes are more excited to read a book about the Bible rather than reading the Bible for the sheer enjoyment of what it has to offer. Wouldn't it be great if we as a church, or at least a small group, committed to following the "read through the Bible in a year program?" Where we just read the word of God and let it speak to us. Where small groups would meet and share the excitement of the things God is revealing about himself to us. Oh some of this is happening I know. There are groups studying certain books of the Bible and it's exciting to hear what people are learning through these studies.

As we allow the seed of love to grow in us our passion for the truth needs to grow as well. And it doesn't stop with the knowing and insight. The reason for this knowledge and insight is so that we can discern what is best.

The leaves and blossoms on our plant is the distinctive lifestyle of the Christian. Paul prays that the Philippians would "be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ." (vs. 10)

Knowledge and insight reveals the truth of God. Discernment is the ability to apply the knowledge and insight from the Bible to our daily living.

Romans 12:1-2

"Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will."

We renew our mind by filling it with the truth that comes from God's word. And then by applying it to daily living we will be able to live a life pleasing to God. It starts with love and grows from knowledge and insight, and produces the leaves and blossoms, a pure and blameless life.

Don't focus on the sin of those around you or of the "the world" but seek out the good which comes from God and allow it to become the focus of your life.

We need to be cautious that we do not forget this calling and unthinkingly become children of our age who reflect and practice the ways of the world except with a Christian gloss on it. Our call is to a whole different life. Our source for this different life is God. We learn how to live it from his revealed Word, and his Son gives us the example to follow.

We are to be pure which refers to our inner character. There should be nothing offensive in us, even to the all seeing eye of God. How easy is it for us to paint the outside, to be smiling and kind to one another while harbouring bitterness or envy or anger towards each other. We look for the latest gossip and secretly revel in the failures of others because it makes us feel better about our own failings. This world love reality shows – Jerry Springer and Big Brother because we are not as bad as the people on these shows.

Have you ever heard of the show TMZ. It based on paparazzi following around stars and trying to get them to say or do something that can then be used against them to show us all their failings and how bad they are. To me it reveals some the darkest aspects of us as people and the extent we go to in order to feel good about ourselves.

Paul prays that we would be pure. Not holding anything against another. Not wishing bad to befall another and being authentic and transparent in our dealing with one another, whether it be amongst ourselves in this building or to those outside. That when something good happens to someone else we don't think why can't this happen to me, but instead we can rejoice and celebrate and be excited for each other.

And this inner purity will be revealed through our blameless lives. There will be nothing others can say against us. Our outer conduct will be in line with the truth revealed in Scripture and based on a love that comes from God.

Warren Wiersbe commented, "To be blameless until the day of Christ can best be measured by answering two questions: 'Will what I do make other people stumble in their walk with God?' and 'Will what I do cause me to be ashamed when Jesus returns for me?'"

Finally, Paul gets to the fruit of this plant that has been growing. "...filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ." (vs. 11)

We are called to obedience and discipline but that is not what makes us grow and produces fruit. God causes the growth. In Mark 4 Jesus tells the story of a farmer who scatters the seed on the ground. But it is all by itself that the seed sprouts and grows. We can plant the seed and tend to the plant but it is God who causes the growth.

The fruit produced is not our activities and programs, being busy is not the same as being mature. We will not cause fruit to grow in our lives any more than farmers can push up their crops to grow out of the soil.

And there are at least two fruits of righteousness that will come through Jesus Christ and not through our own effort. The first is the character of Christ in us. As we connect ourselves with Christ, we bear the fruit of the Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Anyone who has tried to possess these character traits apart from Christ has either failed or is frustrated.

The second fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus and not through our own effort is the opportunity and ability to lead others into a right relationship with God. Again, it is God who is at the centre of this because if a person is persuaded by my efforts alone to turn to God then they can also be persuaded by human efforts to turn away from a relationship with God. We need to remember that our efforts are in partnership with God and that the fruit is as a result of him, not us. But what a joyous thought to consider that God has chosen to partner with us in order to produce this fruit.

As I was researching this sermon I came across these thoughts from another sermon which spoke of the differences between what Church should be like and what the world tries to substitute for Christ's family.

The neighborhood bar is possibly the best counterfeit there is to the fellowship Christ wants to give his church. This made me think of the old sitcom *Cheer's*.

The bar is an imitation dispensing liquor instead of grace, escape rather than reality, but it is permissive, it is accepting and it is an inclusive fellowship (Where everybody knows your name). It is unshockable. It is democratic.

You can tell people secrets and they usually don't tell others or even want to.

The bar flourishes not because most people are alcoholics, but because God has put into the human heart, the desire to know and be known, to love and be loved.

And so many people seek a counterfeit at the price of a few beers.

BUT, there is one more thing that makes the church different than the local tavern. In fact, it is the one thing that makes us different than any other human organization

The church is a place where we train each other to care for one another. And that training starts when we learn to pray - giving thanks for one another... both for what we are, and for what we are yet to become.

This week I challenge you to take the prayer of Paul printed on the back of your bulletin and post it on your fridge, or mirror or wherever you will see it and then to pray it. Not only for yourselves, but for others. Pray it for your closest friend, pray it for someone you are in conflict with. Pray it with humility, grace and a real desire to see the seeds of love which God has planted to grow into the fruit of righteousness that will bring glory and praise to God.

That will be the best witness this church can ever have to the world around it.

AMEN