

Media and Graphics Notes

Sermon Starter Video?	No
Sermon Notes?	There are scripture and sermon notes for the screen
Other Notes	There is no Word of Witness video, despite being in the bulletin.

Key Questions

What is this sermon about?

This sermon is about why to engage in spiritual practices and how we can make them automatic in our life

Why is this sermon important?

This sermon is important because spiritual practices can shape our souls in significant ways.

What is the context of this sermon?

This is an extension of the five week FAQ series. It is the week before Lent.

What are the next action steps?

Read the gospel according to Mark this Lent

What is the good news (bottom line)?

The good news is that the Holy Spirit makes us more like Jesus when we engage in spiritual practices.



Metadata

Topic(s)

1. Change Lives
2. Grow
3. Make Disciples

Sermon Books of the Bible

1. Mark
2. Matthew

5th Sunday after the Epiphany / Transfiguration of the Lord

February 7, 2016

FAQ - What Tiny Habits will grow my faith?

Mark 1:32-39

First United Methodist Church of El Dorado

Preaching Target Word Count: 2,000

Text Online at <http://j.mp/1PHuvFA>

Audio Online at <http://j.mp/1mm5qUV>

Tags

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Mark 1:32-39, CEB

That evening, at sunset, people brought to Jesus those who were sick or demon-possessed. The whole town gathered near the door. He healed many who were sick with all kinds of diseases, and he threw out many demons. But he didn't let the demons speak, because they recognized him.

Early in the morning, well before sunrise, Jesus rose and went to a deserted place where he could be alone in prayer. Simon and those with him tracked him down. When they found him, they told him, "Everyone's looking for you!"

He replied, "Let's head in the other direction, to the nearby villages, so that I can preach there too. That's why I've come." He traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and throwing out demons.

Response to Scripture

One: The Word of God for the People of God.

All: Thanks be to God!

Introduction

Series Review

We all have questions. Sometimes the answers are easy. But, sometimes, our questions are complicated and the answers are difficult to see and even harder to articulate. Join us for worship at First United Methodist Church in January as we address some of the most frequently asked questions about the Christian faith.

Sermon Notes and Scripture Study

Take Notes

I invite you to open your bulletin to a place where you can take notes during the message today.

God Speaking

I pray that you will hear God speaking to you sometime during the service today. Listen for God's word for you – something that helps you live as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Whenever you hear it, write it down.

Tool for Spiritual Growth

Then, take this bulletin home with you so that you can grow in your faith outside of worship by reflecting on what you heard today, praying for others connected with our community and reading scripture.

Prayer

Will you pray with me? O God, use these words to speak good news so that as individuals and as a congregation we will fear nothing but sin, desire nothing but you and live as part of your kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Football, Fundamentals and Christian Formation

Super Bowl 50

Later today, the Denver Broncos and Carolina Panthers will be playing for the Vince Lombardi Trophy in Super Bowl 50. The trophy was “officially renamed in 1970 in memory of legendary NFL head coach Vince Lombardi, after his death from cancer, to commemorate his leading the Green Bay Packers to victories in the first two Super Bowls”¹

Vince Lombardi

In 1960, ten years earlier, Lombardi’s Green Bay Packers lost to the Philadelphia Eagles in the NFL Championship. It would be the last playoff game he would ever lose. The Packers went on to win five championships in the next seven years, including three in a row: 1961, 1962, 1965, 1966 and 1967.

“This is a Football”

On the first day of training camp in July of 1961 ... “[Lombardi] began a tradition of starting from scratch, assuming that the players were blank slates who carried over no knowledge from the year before. He reviewed the fundamentals of blocking and tackling, the basic plays, how to study the playbook. He began with the most elemental statement of all. “Gentlemen,” he said, holding a pigskin in his right hand, “this is a football.”²

Lombardi focused on the fundamentals with fantastic results

The same focus enables us grow in our faith.

Fundamentals of Christianity

Hear these words from Matthew 22:34-40:

“When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had left the Sadducees speechless, they met together. One of them, a legal expert, tested him. “Teacher, what is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

¹ Wikipedia contributors, “Vince Lombardi Trophy,” Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Vince_Lombardi_Trophy&oldid=703314375 (accessed February 7, 2016).

² David Maranis, *When Pride Still Mattered: A Life of Vince Lombardi* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), Google Books Edition.

He replied, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: You must love your neighbor as you love yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands."³

These are the fundamentals of Christianity - love God and love neighbor.

So, how do we focus on the fundamentals of Christianity?

Means of Grace

John Wesley, founder of Methodism focused on the fundamentals of Christianity through the means of grace. According to our denomination's website: "John Wesley taught that God's grace is unearned and that we were not to be idle waiting to experience grace but we are to engage in the means of grace. The means of grace are ways God works invisibly in disciples, hastening, strengthening and confirming faith so that God's grace pervades in and through disciples."⁴

Worship

- Be in worship
- Receive Holy Communion

Grow

- Pray
- Study the Bible - alone and with others
- Be in a group for accountability

Give

- Give financially to God's work and to meet basic human needs

Serve

- Visit
- Feed the hungry
- Seek justice

Share

- Share faith with others

These practices are the fundamentals of Christian spiritual formation. When we engage in these spiritual practices, we live into our identity as a child of God, become sisters and brothers of Jesus and are enabled to be channels of the Holy Spirit.

³ Matthew 22:34-40, CEB

⁴ <http://www.umc.org/how-we-serve/the-wesleyan-means-of-grace>

Fundamentals of Formation

Jesus' Practice of Spiritual Formation

As we seek to build habits of Christian spiritual formation, we turn to the example of Jesus. In Mark 1:35, we read of Jesus' practice of prayer:

Early in the morning, well before sunrise, Jesus rose and went to a deserted place where he could be alone in prayer.

John Wesley's Practice of Spiritual Formation Practice

In college, John Wesley was known to meet with a group of fellow students to pray and study the scriptures every day. He fasted twice a week. He would wake up very early in the morning to spend an hour reading the Bible and praying.

John Wesley's practice of faith may be an inspiration for you or you might find it impossible. It is nearly impossible if you try to start where you want to end up.

Half Marathon Training

Three weeks ago, I started training for the El Dorado Half Marathon. The race is 13.1 miles and is coming up on April 2 right here in El Dorado.

Here is what I am NOT doing to prepare – taking it easy until April 2, then lacing up my shoes and heading out for 13.1 miles. That would be a disaster. Instead, we have a training plan which includes a training schedule which includes logging consistent time running nearly every day, a variety of strength exercises and a long run once a week which gets incrementally longer as the race approaches.

We are focusing on the fundamentals and believing in baby steps.

Believe in Baby Steps

You see, our culture has a problem: people want big results fast. There are any number of quick-fix programs that prey on our desire for overnight solutions.

That's not how human behavior really works.

In fact, we believe the slower the change, the longer it lasts.

This is especially true when it comes to Christian spiritual formation.

50 Behaviors to Love God and Neighbor

The goal of the Christian life is perfect love of God and neighbor. If want to live our life in that way, following the example of Christ, we may need to change 50 behaviors in our life. The means of grace, that Wesley considered essential to the life of faith is not an exhaustive list. Maybe it's more; maybe it's less. Whatever the number, you can't change all 50 behaviors at once, unless you totally change your environment, such as moving to a remote wilderness where you labor daily for food and you have no TV and no internet.

Does changing 50 things in your life sound overwhelming?

I hope not. It's entirely possible. And it's not as hard as it sounds.

You take it little by little.

Believe in baby steps.

Instead of moving to the wilderness, you can start changing in small ways and build momentum over time. This is a very reliable process. Along the way, you will increase your skills and you will adapt your environment. That's what makes change stick.

Tiny Habits and the Discipleship Pathway

You can learn to create habits -- it's a skill

I want to share with you a method which will help you learn to create habits quickly and easily. It was developed by Dr. BJ Fogg, a research psychologist from Stanford University. It is called Tiny Habits.

When you have a spiritual practice in mind, like reading the Bible or praying, the key is to make the behavior more automatic. Eventually, you want these spiritual practices to be reflexes. You don't think about them; you just do them.

Personal Example: Flush the Toilet

For example, after I go to the bathroom, I flush the toilet. I don't deliberate about the behavior. I'm not making a decision. I've developed the habit (it's almost a reflex) of flushing the toilet.

And that's the goal. You can create lots of small changes in your spiritual life -- new behaviors that are automatic. You won't need to exert effort to do these behaviors.

Write a Tiny Habit Recipe

With this method, you will write a habit recipe which anchors the new habit to an existing habit. Like this:

After I [existing routine], I will [new tiny behavior].

-
- 1) Make it tiny
 - 2) Find the right spot
 - 3) Celebrate success

Make it Tiny

The process starts with picking a behavior which:

- you do at least once a day
- that takes you less than 30 seconds
- that requires little effort

Find the Right Spot

Just as important as keeping the behavior tiny is this: Finding the right spot in your daily routine for your new behavior.

In this method, you sequence the new tiny behavior after a habit you already do. This idea of “after” is important. You need to know what specific moment in your routine which will be an “anchor” which will trigger the new tiny behavior you want.

Habits of the Discipleship Pathway

For example:

- After my feet hit the floor in the morning, I will say, “This is the day the Lord has made!”
- After I step in the shower, I will pray “Wash me with your grace, O God.”
- After I pour my morning coffee, I will open the Bible app.
- After I hear a siren, I will pray, “Bless those driving and those at their destination.”
- After I start the dishwasher, I will pray, “Cleanse me from sin.”
- After I walk in the door and put down my bag, I will put my Bible on the table.
- After I put my head on the pillow, I will thank God for one good thing from my day.

Celebrate Success

Each time you do your new Tiny Habit, you need to celebrate your success immediately - either while you’re doing the tiny behavior or within a second of completing it. Find something that works for you, here are just a few:

- Do a physical movement - thumbs up, fist pump, clap once
- Say a word or phrase out loud - “Awesome!” “Great!” “Yes!”
- Vocalize a sound effect out loud - Bah doom, chi!
- Imagine hearing a sound effect - roaring crowd
- Move your face to look happy - smile

I know this may sound goofy, but it works. You need to celebrate and feel good about doing new spiritual practice. Why? Because you are reinforcing yourself. The stronger you feel a positive emotion after your new spiritual practice, the faster it will become automatic in your life.

Practice

Now, let’s practice.

So, here’s the Tiny Habit, we are all going to practice together:

After my feet hit the floor in the morning, I will say, “This is the day the Lord has made!”

So, in just a moment, I am going to invite you to lift your feet off the floor, as you are able. Then on the count of three, we will put our feet down and say together, “This is the day the Lord has made!” Then, we’ll celebrate - so take a moment and consider how you are going to celebrate.

Let’s go...

Feet up...

Imagine that you are waking up in the morning...

Feet hit the ground - 1, 2, 3...

"This is the day the Lord has made!"

"Yes!"

Conclusion

Good News

The good news is that the Holy Spirit makes us more like Jesus when we engage in spiritual practices.

Call to Action

This Wednesday, we begin the season of Lent – the 40-day season of fasting and spiritual growth in which we remember our need for Good Friday and Easter. This year we are inviting you to read the Gospel according to Mark with the rest of our congregation during Lent. Reading the Bible may be a daily habit for you or you may be creating this habit in your life.

No matter what your current practice of reading the Bible is or isn't, plan to focus on this short book about the life of Jesus in the weeks ahead. You can find the reading plan in your bulletin or pick up a complete copy in the church office.

Invitation

The fundamentals of our faith matter.

Over time, tiny habits shape our soul in significant ways.

We can become like Christ.

Closing Prayer

[Text here]

Amen.