

October 22, 2006

Renewal II

Luke 7:11-15

Last week we read from Luke that Jesus met a funeral procession coming out of the town of Nain. A young man had died and they were carrying his body to be buried. His widowed mother was caught up in her grief. Her grief got Jesus' attention. He went to her to calm her broken heart. He then turned to the deceased and raised him from the dead. Here we have two renewals, one is the grieving heart of the mother, the other is the physical heart of the son.

Gifts come to us with some strings attached. One of the strings attached to the gift of life is that the recipient live a life worthy of the expectations of the giver. It also carries with it the responsibility to the man inside. We have an obligation to keep that man or heart or spirit alive and active. This morning I would like for us to give some thought to carrying out our responsibility for keeping the inner man alive and active.

We refer to this core part of our being, that part of us created in the image of God, as the inner man or the heart or the spirit. I share with you the description by the poet Gibran as he directs our thoughts toward this inner man in the right direction:

The spirit in every being is made manifest in the eyes, the countenance, and in all bodily movements and gestures. Our appearance, our work, our actions are never greater than ourselves. For the soul is our house; our eyes its windows; and our words its messengers.

(The Wisdom of Gibran)

It is important as to what happens outside of us. It is of supreme importance as to what is happening inside of us. It is that man inside, the heart and soul of the individual, that makes a difference between existing and living. In the normal course of events the body grows old and begins to fade away. This need not be true of the spirit. In his second letter to the Church in Corinth St Paul writes, “... *but thou our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.*”

It helps our thought process when we recognize that God

did not design our lives to be lived year by year but day by day. *“Give us this day our daily bread.”* We can’t count on this year as ours, today is all we have. Life is a day by day process. We have a responsibility through this gift of life that is ours to see that the inner man is reinvigorated and renewed each day. If we are to keep the spark of the more abundant life blazing we cannot let it wither away with a physical body.

Spiritually fit we are not only able to lift our living to a higher plane we can become a means whereby our fellowman might do likewise. How we treat our fellowman is a revelation of our own character, of the spirit by which we live.

Christianity doesn’t teach us that all men are equal. It does teach us that the strong are to bear the infirmities of the weak.

As Christians we are to extend a helping hand to those that seek our help that we may help them to discover life on a higher plane and a happier scheme of things.

It goes without saying that sometime, somewhere each of us serves as an example. There is always someone that looks

up to each of us for directions be those directions up or down. As we move toward the life more abundant we can be the instrument by which someone else will follow. That is follow if they want to. We cannot help the other man by osmosis. There has got to be a desire to keep the spirit within alive and kicking. We have to commit to a regular discipline to keep that man healthy.

You in this class, better than I, know that life can be an exhausting experience. We never know when the Northeasterner will come roaring down on us. When it hits, unless that man inside, the spirit, is up and kicking we will go down miserably in defeat. We have to prepare that inner man as we would a football team facing a schedule of all away games against Top Ten Teams.

Life is like a game of chance. If we are going to win it takes all the forethought and preparation we can muster. As Paul tells us, *“Take time and trouble to keep yourselves spiritually fit.”* Paul couldn't have said it better. It is

important that we commit to take the time and trouble to become spiritually fit.

Life is a gift, spiritual fitness is not. Spiritual fitness comes “*out of taking time and trouble to become spiritually fit.*” It is the responsibility that we owe to the man inside.

God didn't turn us loose to reinvent the wheel when it comes to spiritual fitness or the renewal of the spirit. God sends us a companion, a comforter. This companion provides us with many channels that will assist us as we seek to grow spiritually.

First and foremost is the Bible. Not just the Bible but reading the Bible for its spiritual message. I grant you that there is a lot in the Bible that will not assist us as we try to grow that man inside. What is the importance to our spiritual growth as who begot who or who fit the Battle of Jericho? All the history and geography is an interesting study particularly now that the Holy Land is the center of political unrest. To grow spiritually, to strengthen the man inside, we need to read

the Bible to learn how to live our life. If the words of Christ on how to live will take root in our heart the Bible will have accomplished it's purpose as a channel of spiritual strength. It will build within us that strength of spirit that will enable us to stand under pressure and meet the issues of life.

I think it was Abraham Lincoln who popularized the phrase, "*United we stand, divided we fall.*" There is strength in joining together like minds and like hearts. John Wesley characterized the strength of the Methodist Church saying, "*If your heart is right with my heart, put your hand in mine.*" We are a tribal people. We feed off those of like minds.

The church was ordained by God. It is one of those channels given us to help us grow spiritually. The purpose of the Church is to lead the individual to worship God. Hymns are sung, prayers are lifted, words are spoken, all with one aim, that God may become a reality in the heart and soul of the individual. God ministers to us, strengthens our spirit through our association with others striving after the more abundant

life. We are not perfect but we are part of that group who seeks to strengthen the spirit by following after the high, the noble, and the good. As we seek to strengthen the man inside we do well to gather in worship with those who are trying to seek and find and possess the best. Birds of a feather flock together. They do so because the strength of like hearts tend to rub off.

As we read the Bible for its spiritual message and mingle with those of like hearts in worship high thoughts and noble emotions will be kindled in the man inside. As we seek to revive the inner man it is important that we control our thoughts. As we direct our thoughts so the inner us will direct our feelings and emotions. What we are on the inside will ultimately show on the outside. By controlling the thoughts that go in we control the person that we are. By fixing our minds on certain things we can control the whole man.

“Whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on

these things.”

As we think so we become. It is like opening the blinds on a bright fall day and let the sunshine pour in to warm the room.

The Bible, worship, high thoughts, we can't stop the treatment now. We have to practice what we preach. Why try to revive a dying man inside if we are not going to allow him to live outside? Little good to dream if we don't do something about it.

It is not enough to awaken the spiritual man inside, we have to pass it on and we will pass it on. Speak a word of encouragement to those with whom we come in contact. Respond to those high inspirations that rise from within. Those we touch will feel better and we will feel better. Best of all we revive the man inside so that we can truly live, live the more abundant life.

When we have reached that plane the heart is free to cry, *“God is in his Heaven, all is right with the world.”* The

center of the faith that revives the failing spiritual man is that God is here and is responsive to the individual cry and need.

There is within each of us untapped sources of energy. A latent power waiting to be tapped as we discover the secret of self renewal of the man inside.

God gave us life and Christ came to show us how to live, not just live, but live the more abundant life. Arthur Gordon sums up what I have been trying to say in just nine words: *“Love life – and it will love you right back.”* God is love and God is life.

Pastor's Message

A basic reality of life is that a man must live with himself. Furthermore, basic to emotional health and any sort of happiness is that a man must so live that he can respect himself. In order to accomplish this end, one must set inviolable standards by which he must live and act.

Robert Louis Stevenson, who achieved a wholesome and delightful philosophy of life for himself in the face of the greatest difficulties, has this to say about what a man should do: "To be honest, to be kind, to earn a little and spend a little less, to make upon the whole a family happier for his presence, to renounce when that shall be necessary and not to be embittered, to keep a few friends, but these without capitulation. Above all, on the same grim conditions to keep friends with himself. Here is a task for all that a man has of fortitude and delicacy."

Struggles with outward circumstances are often terrific, but they are not decisive. The decisive struggles of the human spirit are within. Appropriately is it written in the scripture, "He that ruleth his own spirit is greater than he that taketh a city."

PRAYER

Strengthen me, O God, that I may win the battles within and find peace and tranquility of spirit. Amen.

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