

BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI
THE WORSHIP OF GOD • MARCH 8, 2020
THE SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

The Litany
Based on Psalm 121

*I lift up my eyes to the hills. From whence will my help come?
My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.*

God will not let your foot be moved;

God, who keeps you, will neither slumber or sleep.

The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand.

The sun shall not strike you by day nor the moon by night.

**The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in
from this time on and forevermore.**

The Scripture
John 4:31-38

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

The Message
All Groan Up: Sustenance
Mark Briley

Synopsis: Everyone is counting calories these days. And yes, there's an app for that. Metabolism shifts over time, and our body's needs change as well. When you're experiencing a growth spurt as a youth, parents often say, "You're a growing boy! You're a growing girl! Eat up!" We learn quickly that food for the body is necessary to sustain its strength, its health, its growth. Jesus often turns physical realities into spiritual lessons. "I've got food you don't even know about," Jesus says to the disciples. They think he's been holding out on his stash of snacks. Jesus counters with something much deeper than that -- sustenance for the soul.



A twenty-something journalist was writing an article about how to find yourself in the decade of your twenties and he offered this line: *“Figuring out life in our twenties can feel like searching for a specific marble while floundering in a swimming pool filled with marbles -- in the dark.”*¹ My guess is that a number of us could claim that truth for whatever decade of life we are currently living through. Are you trying to figure out your life? Sort it out? Wonder about the ‘why’s’ and ‘how’s’ of your 30’s or 40’s or 70’s or 80’s? It’s such a curious thing; life that is. That same journalist says, *“Chances are nobody’s going to name a high school after you for quite a while.”* He says there’s great discouragement for those coming out of college or maneuvering into adulthood thinking they’re about to flip the world’s script on what is and what can be. They enter that decade of life ready to change the world!

We understand this. Add my name to the list of those who want to see the world to change. We’ve heard the challenge, and we want to be Game Changers. History Makers. Change Agents. We learn early on that we can look the part on social media, which has left another millennial professional asking of his own generation: Might we become the most overrated generation ever? He suggests that we’ve skewed the Golden Rule to read, *“Look good unto others as you want them to look good unto you;”* noting, as a physically short man himself, *“I look so tall on Instagram!”* What do we want? *Success!* When do we want it? *Now!*

Author Paul Angone² admitted, *“I thought the only problem after college would be picking which amazing job offer to take.”* When the opportunities didn’t surface, Paul and his college roommate, Rob, went to the same temp agency to find work. *“Rob was placed at a warehouse packaging nutcrackers. Big wooden Christmas nutcrackers. By himself, packing one nutcracker after another. Him and his degree in computer science keeping him company.”* Paul was sent to interview for a position as a used-airplane-parts sales assistant. *“Now this was my first real out-of-college interview so, understandably, I was nervous as I walked into the office. Not about messing up the interview, mind you, which is probably what a person should be worried about at their first interview. No, I was scared, because I’d just realized I must have been flying*

¹ From Joel Delgado’s article: *All Groan Up: 7 Truths For Every Twentysomething*. His article was inspired by his friend, Paul Angone’s book entitled, *“All Groan Up”*.

² All Groan Up. Paul Angone. Zondervan. Grand Rapids, MI. 2014. This sermon series’ title came from Angone’s book title though there is little reflected in the series besides the title.

around this whole time in airplanes with **used** parts.” He interviewed for the job nonetheless as he noted, “My one in the same checking/savings account totaled \$67.”

Paul’s potential employer walked him around the office, introducing him to other people wandering around, each one offering some version of, “*It’s an absolute thrill to work here,*” and “*This is a great opportunity with a lot of upward mobility.*” He said, “*Soon I was completely convinced – not about my future working there, but about the fact that all of them were either:*

- A.** *terrorist alien drones sent to earth to sabotage our airline industry.*
- B.** *prisoners who had disrespected the Used-Airplane-Parts Feudal Lord of Santa Barbara and were being held captive.*
- C.** *regular people who desperately wanted to escape but were being sedated with gas through the overhead vents.*
- D.** *regular people who had become comfortable living crappily ever after.*

After this wake-up-moment for Paul, and maybe wake-up-moments you’ve experienced in your own life, the idea of ‘*changing the world*’ quickly jumps into the backseat, taking a nap while the ‘*reality of continued living*’ takes over. The summarized reflection for these two men became this: “*Maybe our twenties isn’t about looking for ways to microwave success, but about gathering the ingredients, tools, and instructions necessary to have success later. Instead of fretting about our lack of success or enviously looking over our fences at the success of others, we need to start working with what little we have now, so that it can turn into something awesome later.*” Oh, but such requires great patience, doesn’t it? And who has time for patience?

It is our faith, however, that is always preparing us to embrace the *now* in hopes of reaping all the joy that is yet to come. The Apostle Paul says it well... his word to the church at Rome the actual inspiration for our Lenten series, “*All Groan Up.*” Do you remember this word?

All around us we observe a pregnant creation. The difficult times of pain throughout the world are simply birth pangs. But it’s not only around us; it’s within us. The Spirit of God is arousing us within. We’re also feeling the birth pangs. These sterile and barren bodies of ours are yearning for full deliverance. That is why waiting does not diminish us, any more than waiting diminishes a pregnant mother. We are enlarged in the waiting. We, of course, don’t see what is enlarging us. But the longer we wait, the larger we become, and the more joyful our expectancy. – Romans 8:22-25

We’re talking about groaning pains, my friends. Think of it this way. Everyone is counting calories these days. And yes, there’s an app for that: “*My Fitness Pal*” is one I’ve attempted to use to hold myself accountable to my own fitness goals, not always successfully. Why is this important when it comes to our bodies? Metabolism shifts over time and our body’s needs change as well. When you’re experiencing a growth

spurt as a youth, parents often say, “*You’re a growing boy! You’re a growing girl! Eat up!*” We learn quickly that food for the body is necessary to sustain its strength, its health, its growth. Jesus often turns physical realities into spiritual lessons, and he does so in our scripture passage of focus today: “*I’ve got food you don’t even know about,*” Jesus says to the disciples. They think he’s been holding out on his stash of snacks. But Jesus counters with something much deeper than that – sustenance for the soul.

The passage from John’s Gospel we consider today has some similarities to last week’s engagement with the story of Nicodemus, and what it means to be “*Born from above.*” Jesus offers up a difficult idea and then explains it from a spiritual perspective. It is sort of like Jesus being a director at the True/False Festival. After the movie, he comes out to explain how it all came to be. In today’s pericope, or passage of Scripture, we read the “*Director’s Cut*” of what has happened in Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well (*which we’ll consider more deeply next week*). He has this dramatic and taboo encounter with her and then the director yells, “*Cut!*” and the disciples are left with Jesus saying, “*Break down that scene for us, Jesus, because that... was.... nuts.*”

Now food is used as a tool into this story, but the point doesn’t have a whole lot to do with food at all. They all are hungry – Jesus stops at the well as the disciples go on into town to pick up some White Castle sliders. They come back with food, having left Jesus as hungry as the rest of them were, only to find him saying, “*I’m not hungry.*” They are a bit perturbed as they sprung for his lunch and now, “*He’s not hungry?!?!*”

I imagine Jesus, who was just deeply moved by this encounter with the Samaritan woman, is a little frustrated with the disciples – whether rightfully so or not is beside the point. Maybe he’s just projecting upon them his frustration with the day onto those closest to him. We never do that do we? ... In a sort of twitter-style **ALL CAPS** frustration Jesus says to them: “***I HAVE FOOD TO EAT YOU KNOW NOTHING ABOUT!***” Jesus gets a little “sass” here.

When we get to sit down as the Briley Five for family dinner, we have this practice of sharing our “*Peaks and Pits.*” These are stories from the day: we all share high lights (*peaks*) and low lights (*pits*). One night, as we were telling our stories, and some of us having to practice patience to wait as others shared, Morgan was sharing a peak from her day, As she was trying to name a particular place a teacher’s son was serving in the military, “*I think he was in...*” or “*Well maybe he was in...*” our youngest Hayes, felt the need to swing the convo and he tosses out this gem: “*I know where Jesus is! He’s in your heart!*” This was totally sweet of course but then, as only Hayes can, he adds: “*And sometimes he’s IN. YO. FACE!*” [*insert erupting eight-year-old laughter at himself*].

If you asked the disciples where Jesus was, they would probably tell you such was true... and maybe this was just such a moment that he was in their faces. The disciples had their minds on their stomachs, and Jesus had his mind on the soul. Now – I get the stomach part. You’ve got to eat, and we know food was a central focus of Jesus’ own enjoyment and certainly his ministry. In just a few more pages in the story, Jesus feeds 5,000 people. This isn’t a plot against food. It was just the opening of the moment to talk about the lasting effort of the spiritual realm. Food’s great and necessary, but you get hungry again in a few hours. Jesus says the sustenance you need is a satisfaction of the soul that will last for an eternity. This is always the harder focus for us. An eternity is not something we can easily grasp. A fish sandwich, however, brings immediate gratification. We get that. But Jesus presses, as he always does, to look deeper – to look through the murkiness of life and see what is most important.

One of my buddies is a brilliant guy, a great friend; one of those guys who could bury you quickly playing trivial pursuit but gives you enough space to get an answer or two, so you feel like you are part of the experience. I was talking with him, and he shared a metaphor this week that connects here, I believe. He said, *“Imagine before you, sitting on a table, is a glass of muddy water. It’s thick and dark and impossible to see through. In our general attempts to clear the water, by stirring it or attempting to spoon out the mud, we generally just make it worse. But if you are patient and sit with it for a bit – the mud will settle to the bottom of the glass and you can see straight through it.”*

How is this like your life? Something is presented to you – a challenge, a concern, a problem. It gets a little muddy. Do you immediately launch into it trying to fix it, or justify it, or lash back only to find you’re just making the situation murkier all the time? What if you sit with it first? Let the impurities and darkness and dirt all sift to the bottom first? Then, you can see the situation more clearly and with a calm spirit, determine what is needed; what next step is best.

Jesus tells the disciples that the life of faith will be like that sometimes. You’ll be ready for Easter, but find its only week two of the season of Lent. And it is even a “spring forward Sunday” with a loss of sleep. There’s spiritual work to be done now that will bring Easter most clearly, but you can’t always get Easter ahead of time. It comes in its right time. Jesus points the disciples to the fields of Sychar behind them – famous for its corn crop. Agricultural land was very limited in stony, rocky Palestine – practically nowhere else in the country could a person look up and see waving fields of golden corn.³ The very people of that community were hitting the hills to bring in the harvest as Jesus is talking with the disciples. Sometimes you get to see the harvest without having to have done any of the sowing. They may be thinking sweet corn on the cob, but Jesus is thinking of this community of people, who are now primed to receive the Good news of Christ... all because of his taboo encounter with the woman at the well.

³ Exegetical support for this passage comes from William Barclay’s commentary on The Gospel of John. The Westminster Press. 1975.

Her faith, now enlivened by the grace and love Jesus extended to her, would be sown into her community, and her whole town was now engaging the faith.

With International Women's Day being celebrated today, it is fitting to celebrate this woman, so often overlooked because of her past, now the very hinge upon which her whole village comes to faith. You just never know... and for that very reason... you sow the faith. You take each moment of your day as a faith moment. You don't have to be whacky about it – just faithful – just consistent – just mindful. Whatever you face, let the murky junk of this world sift to the bottom and then look through the issue with your faith to see what seed you can sow. You may never see the harvest of your sowing but that's not ours to decide. We all have benefited from others who have sown before us.

My student church in Indianapolis was a marvelous place to learn in a fast-paced, fast-growing environment. The vision of the church grew to start a second campus in an area just north of the city – a town called Fishers, Indiana. Fishers was in the top ten of the fastest growing cities in the United States at that time. It was booming in every way – but there was not a Disciples church in that area. The vision of our church became to create a Disciples presence in that community – to sow the love of Christ there in the unique way our voice was positioned to do so. The region was positioned to gift us much of the land (*coming from the proceeds of sale from another beloved Disciples congregation who longed for a Disciples presence in that area.*) We were beginning a campaign to build a campus there and launch a second site – we would be one church in two locations. At one of the vision meetings sharing how this might come to pass, one man said to the group gathered, *“Why would I participate in this? Why would I pay to build a church up there that I will never attend or benefit from?”* And a woman in the group casually, yet extremely effectively piped in saying, *“It's a good thing no one said that about the building you're sitting in now.”*

We all can thank God for the saints who have gone before us, sowing the seeds of faith that are coming to harvest in our very lives now that they have never been able to see. Jesus says, *“Sometimes you'll harvest a benefit of none of your own effort... and sometimes... you'll be the ones sowing for the benefit of another yet to come.”*

It's all perspective, isn't it? And the sustenance we need is found in our contentment to humbly sow and sow and then be grateful along the way when we harvest the faith-sowing of others. It's like the three brick layers, who were each working on a separate wall of the same new church construction project. A person walking along the job site asked each one of them, *“What are you building?”* The first guy answers, *“Nothing. I'm just laying bricks.”* The second guy answers, *“I'm building a wall.”* The third answers, *“I'm building a cathedral!”* Which perspective best feeds the soul?

What are you building with your lives, my friends? Can you see *whatever* it is you're doing as the work of God? Is Christ in your heart? Or maybe you need him to be in

your face even for a minute. See him in whatever you're doing and know the gift of harvest and the blessing of the opportunity to sow is one we are to treasure with a sense of gratitude.

I have church friends send me word this week about some of the most difficult things they've ever experienced in their lives, happening right now. Is Christ at work in it? It's hard to see, but I was inspired as each in their own way said, "*I see Christ at work... even in this.*" Another had surgery... another is rebuilding a marriage... another was working toward their first mission trip... another was overcoming loneliness... another was you... whether you shared with me or not... another was you... working through that hard moment, that season, that challenge, that struggle... wondering what sustenance could hold you now.

Persian poet Hafez offers this: "*This place where you are right now, God circled on a map for you. Wherever your eyes and arms and heart can move against the earth and sky, the Beloved has bowed there, the Beloved has bowed there knowing you were coming.*"

It is the faithful effort every day that makes us game changers, change agents and history makers. *Sometimes* we harvest. *All* the time we sow. Is God's sustaining love at work in this world? That is a big question these days. I can only conclude by the gift I see walking with you every day? – without a doubt... without a doubt.

May it be so.