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MERIDIAN STREET UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

How is it with your soul?

Colossians 2:6-7; Luke 9:23-25

We have dozens of conversations each day. We share our wisdom on a variety of subjects all day long. We can speak with passion and enthusiasm on many issues.

I imagine some of you can give me great financial advice. You not only know the balance in your bank account, you are knowledgeable about recent events in the stock market, and you have ideas about how we should proceed financially in this state and in this nation. I imagine we have some financial wizards in our midst.

I imagine that you have definite ideas about politics. You can go on and on about your preference in this season of primary elections. You know who is going to be a good leader for this nation and who we should avoid. We may not agree on the same leader, but we all have confidence about our choice.

I imagine that you can speak articulately about your favorite Alma mater or your favorite sports team or your favorite hobby. You have knowledge about the pastimes that hold your interest.

I imagine that you could deliver a full blown presentation about the life of a particular athlete or author or Hollywood star that you appreciate.

Think about it. There are subjects that you absolutely know. It may be gardening or math, music or sports.

You are intelligent, well informed and articulate.

However if asked, "How is it with your soul?" My guess is that most of us would answer with a long pause. We know much about many things, but how well have we formed the words to express the power and presence of God in our life?

Read Colossians 2:6-7

Prayer

We have been in a process this month to Imagine Meridian. We have considered radical hospitality, we have explored what it means to be Christian community, we have imagined how we might be in ministry in the community, but today, we contemplate the very core of our faith. Today we ponder the spiritual connection of our soul to God and to the other souls of this community of faith.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, did not set out to create a denomination. His plan in 1739 was to create a path of discipleship and accountability for a few individuals who came to him desperately seeking change in their lives. He met with them once a week to discuss new life in Christ. Over time, class meetings patterned on his work with that small group of individuals began to become a part of the already established Anglican Church. The class meetings were small gatherings of people who were in covenant with each other. They gathered weekly and they talked about the fundamentals of faith. They talked about issues of the soul. Their aim was transformation of their individual lives and of the faith community as a whole.

In a recent article by Tom Ehrich printed in the *Indianapolis Star*, he speaks about the continued aim of transformation. In his article concerning church wellness, he asks the question, "Are we simply bolstering the institution, or are we leading people deeper in their faith and helping them seek a new life? Are we so focused on the mechanics of membership growth that we fail to see whether members are actually growing as people?"

Transformation is a process that brings change, growth, and depth to our living.

Are we growing as people of faith, as people rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ, as people who are claimed by God?

Meridian Street, for all that we do, for all the ministries we provide, for all the programming we offer, our foundation is ultimately spiritual; ours is a journey of the soul. As stated in Colossians, we gather to root our lives in Christ, to live in Christ.

In the tradition of the founder of our faith tradition, John Wesley, the most important question we can explore is, "How is it with your soul?" As we look to our future, as we Imagine Meridian, it is imperative that we look most deeply at our spiritual connection to our God and our spiritual connection to one another. We are not just strangers who gather for an hour each week to hear music, scripture, prayer and sermon. We are not just a collection of unrelated people who come to admire the architecture or listen to the organ, choir and bells. We gather as followers of Jesus Christ. We gather to center our lives in the teachings of Jesus. We gather expecting to experience the presence of God. We gather knowing that even our best efforts at living fall short when we are not mindful of our soul.

"How is it with your soul?" This is the place to explore the answer to that question. This is the place to dig deeper into our relationship with God. This is the place to discuss soul issues with people we learn to know and trust, with others who yearn to grow closer to the Divine, others who continue to seek transformation.

Wayne Dwyer writes in his book, *Your Sacred Self* that life is a sacred quest. I love that image. It gives us direction for living of our days. Life, your life, my life, our life together is a sacred quest. We are on a quest of spirit and soul. We are seekers of light, keepers of faith, disciples of Jesus Christ.

The quest itself moves us from a list of beliefs to a sense of knowing. The quest takes us from a life of shallow existence and superficial relationships to encounters of the soul. The apostle Paul

spoke of this knowing as having “the mind of Christ.” In the gospel of Luke this knowing is described as putting aside the agenda of the ego and taking up the cross of Christ each day, walking with Christ, seeking not our desires, but following in the footsteps of the Divine. Becoming a partner with Christ as we live out our days in this world.

In his book, *If God Is Love*, author Phillip Gulley speaks with great affection about a woman named Mary Shaw. He writes that Mary Shaw “knew God.” He goes on to say, “When she spoke of Jesus, it was if he lived in her house, drove with her in her car, and sat in her kitchen with her. Her relationship with God was full of peace and joy. Mary taught me that knowing God is the prize. Pure religion is not about earning heaven or escaping hell. It is about discerning our proper place in creation - God did not create us to be cowering supplicants or greedy schemers, striving to escape this world. Instead, we see ourselves as God see us - as the crown of creation, children created in his image, precious in his sight, capable of loving as we have been loved, and destined to dwell with God forever.”

The sacred quest is growing ever closer and ever clearer about God’s love for us and our ability to share that love with others.

The question we encounter today is how do we go about putting the nurture of spirit and soul as our first priority. I believe this to be the most important question we can ask ourselves. You may have an immediate answer; you may need to ponder it awhile. How do we continue to move from conversations at the surface of our living to conversations about the sacred quest of our soul? The answers that you share will be the most important responses upon which we build our future.

How is it with your soul? It is a question we will continue to ask at Meridian Street. It will not just catch us scratching our heads, or turning around to look at someone else hoping that they have an answer, or hemming and hawing. We will not only ask the question, but also be in a consistent process of seeking insight from the question.

When the last day comes to each one of us, it will matter little how articulate we are about the stock market, or football or music. In the last moments of our life it will matter not how much we know about our favorite author. What matters today, tomorrow and eternally will be how clear we are about our soul connection to our God. What matters is how we are growing in love for God? How are we living in ways that honor our God? How is grace becoming a way of life, not just a word in our vocabulary? How do we live peacefully in our home, at work, in this community? When do we offer our voice for the marginalized, the oppressed, the poor, the rejected? How often do we bow down before our God and ask for forgiveness? How often do we offer forgiveness to one who has caused us harm? What matters today, tomorrow and eternally is the state of our soul; your soul, my soul, and the soul of Meridian Street.

Take a few minutes, consider your life as a sacred quest and share what you think the next steps at Meridian Street will be to deepen our spiritual connection to the Divine and to each other. Think about it, pray about it, write about it. And by all means continue your sacred quest. If you are at the starting point, it is as easy as looking at yourself in the mirror and asking, “How is it with your soul?” The answer is the journey of a lifetime and beyond.