

Date:7/25/2021

Title: "Another Way of Living:Simply"

Scripture: Ecc. 4:1-8

- Introduction

The book of Ecclesiastes is an exploration of the meaning of life as told by a preacher king, a son of David. As he explains life, he points out the many ways that we waste our time chasing after fruitless activities. He calls it chasing the wind.

Verses 4-6 address it most directly:

⁴ I saw that all labor and all skillful work is due to one person's jealousy of another. This too is futile and a pursuit of the wind.

⁵ The fool folds his arms
and consumes his own flesh.

⁶ Better one handful with rest
than two handfuls with effort and a pursuit of the wind.

So much of today's life is spent chasing after the next best thing. Competing in the rat race of one upmanship, trying to figure out who has the best toys. Yet if we step out of that entirely, if we simply fold our arms and do nothing, then we starve ourselves. But we also know that spending all of our time grasping after everything is futile as well. The preacher king knew this too and suggested one handful of rest and another of work. The Church of the Brethren over the years has sought to find the way to do this in our own lives.

- Understanding the Bible together

- When we face a difficult topic like this, the Brethren do something rather unique, we ask what other Brethren understand the Bible to be saying and then after hearing all the voices we come to a common understanding of the message from the scripture.
- We've looked at living simply a number of times in somewhat recent history. I'm going to share some of what was said here.

- Christian Lifestyle 1980 Church of the Brethren Statement

"Historically Brethren have identified the "simple life" as an essential element of Christian discipleship. Simplicity has been commended not for its own sake, but for the purpose of seeking first the kingdom (Mt. 6:33). The church has held up the simple life as a means to unity and integrity, to experiencing the transforming will and power of God, and to living out the beatitude, "Blessed are the pure in heart" (Mt. 5:8).

For nearly three centuries our identity as Brethren and Christians has been more closely tied to how we live than it has to creeds and doctrines. At times in the past this has taken the form of rigid legalism. In the present generation we are obsessed with individuals doing their own thing. Neither of these extremes conforms to the mind of Christ. Yet we have found it easier to repent for the

legalism of our forebears than for our own sin of indifference and lack of discernment.”

- Simple Life - 1996 Church of the Brethren Statement

“Simplicity is living not conformed to the world, but transformed by Christ. Neither rules nor programs, neither simplistic answers nor legalism can fully define the simple life. Jesus’s way of simplicity is at the heart of the gospel. It is central to our faith and practice, not optional. To make it less than central is sinful. Simple living is sometimes difficult. But to those who embark on this humble journey God provides joy and peace.”
- The Way of Jesus is one of devotion to God.
 1. Our love for God and neighbors is a treasure above all other wealth and possessions.
 2. Single-hearted devotion to God draws us to cultivate spiritual disciplines that render us receptive to the Spirit: Bible reading and study, prayer and meditation, worship in the gathered community, service to others. Through these we can listen for and act on God’s leading, rather than bowing to serve the world which fragments us.
 3. Devotion to God makes us aware that the earth and the fullness thereof belong to God. They are not ours to possess. Grateful thanksgiving to God abounds as we care for the earth and share its resources with those in need.
- The Way of Jesus is one of integrating inward faith and outward expressions of daily living.
 1. Integration honors time as God’s gift and remembers the Way of Jesus: patient, forbearing, unhurried.
 2. Integration joins our words with the living Word of God so that our yes becomes yes and our no becomes no.
 3. Integration of faith and living shows reverence for our bodies given to serve God, free from toxins, indulgences, and overwork. Our bodies are temples for the Holy Spirit, not idols to gratify.
 4. Integration guides us to compassion for those living in poverty.
- The Way of Jesus is one of community.
 1. We cannot live the simple life alone. We need the faith community to counsel and disciple us in the habits of simplicity. We need to uphold each other in this Way.
 2. We need a faith community that models Jesus’ way by surrendering its own power, prestige, and possessions. Buildings and budgets, pensions and programs can obscure our vision and hinder our prayer. We, the church, can stand for Jesus only when we stand apart from the values of the world. Our sisters and brothers in poor countries can teach us much about joyous living in simplicity.
 3. God redeems us to live in community with the created earth. We will care for God’s earth in ways that are sustainable.

4. The community of faith will discuss and discern specific ways to simplify, without resorting to one final description of simplicity to enforce. We will not shrink from acting in renewed ways that may seem difficult. May God renew us as thoroughly as the widow who, with the two coins she offered at the temple, gave all her living to God.
- Simple Living Conference
 - Fifty Christians from many denominations, including Church of the Brethren, Mennonites, Methodists, Old German Baptist Brethren, New Conference, and others, met at Camp Brethren Woods in Virginia to discuss simple living. These are ideas they shared:

Simplicity of the heart

I spend time on building relationships, not acquiring things.

I am working at being grateful.

I am trying to exchange valuing busyness for compassion, which often means slowing down.

Simple technology

I downloaded an app that turns off the internet at 10 pm.

I realized that a certain game was making me agitated, so I deleted it.

I leave my phone downstairs at night.

On Sunday morning, I don't use my phone until after church.

I light a candle when I grind my coffee on Sunday morning and don't check e-mail.

I purposely don't have a smart phone.

Household simplicity

We keep the thermostat at 65 in the winter.

We wear sweaters.

We don't use air conditioning.

I wash clothes on the gentle cycle rather than using a dry cleaner.

I hang laundry to dry.

We just have a small number of plates and glasses. Nobody needs more.

Simple shopping

I buy classic style clothes that don't look dated quickly.

I shop at thrift stores.

When I buy things, especially shoes and clothing, I give away an equal number or more. "Be a conduit, not a hoarder."

I take clothing to be recycled at H & M (clothing store).

I buy good quality purses that last rather than cheap ones that wear out quickly.

Simple eating

I eat less meat.

I don't eat unseasonal fresh produce shipped from far away in the winter.

Our church started a community garden and shares produce with our neighbors.

I put insulating blankets over fall crops so they last into the winter.

Simple transportation

I try to make just one trip per week to town to run errands.

I arranged a ride [to the conference] rather than driving myself.

I learned how to "hypermile," driving carefully to use less fuel.

- Conclusion

In conclusion, I'm going to leave you with the closing words of the 1996 Simple Living statement, but first let me note that the biggest victim of a non-simple life is our relationship with the Lord. When we have so many things going on in our lives, we miss the gifts of this world. When we are too busy, we miss opportunities to help others and in turn be blessed. When we pursue things, our money ends up going to interest payments and credit card debt and we enrich companies at the expense of ministries that could have been. That's why I think the 1996 statement ends as it does:

"We repent of poor stewardship, of trusting wealth and possessions for security, of abandoning Christ's way of living. We confess these sins and confess our faith in the gracious Way of Jesus.

With Christ at the center, the Bible at one hand, and the witness of the community at the other, we face temptation with faith and courage. When tempted to accumulate wealth, we will hear the voice of Jesus proclaiming, "Seek ye first the Kingdom." When tempted to hurry and be busy, we will hear our spirit forebears calling, Seek ye first the Kingdom." When we covet power, prestige, and possessions, we will join our sisters and brothers in the church singing, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God."

- Next Week

Next week we will continue looking at Another Way of Living by focusing on going through life Together. We will look specifically at James 2:15-17.

May your week be a blessed one,

-Pastor Brian