

## TREASURES OF THE TRANSFORMED LIFE

### *“Jumping in with Both Feet”*

*A sermon by Dr. J. Matthew Burton, Jr.*

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**(Psa 12:1-2 NRSV)** Help, O LORD, for there is no longer anyone who is godly; the faithful have disappeared from humankind. {2} They utter lies to each other; with flattering lips and a double heart they speak.

**(Eph 1:3-10 NRSV)** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, {4} just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. {5} He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, {6} to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. {7} In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace {8} that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight {9} he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, {10} as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

### **TOES IN THE WATER**

We are now halfway through our journey in the study, *Treasures of the Transformed Life*. The first week we looked at what it means to be committed to God’s Kingdom work. Last week we talked about connecting to God through prayer. Today we are going to talk about presence. Some people don’t think it is important to be present at Church on Sunday morning and be involved with the God’s family called the church. I want to say right off the bat that I think they are wrong. Being together as a community of faith is important. I also believe there is an incredible transforming power in coming together as a church. Being committed to presence and attendance—giving God the opportunity to do all that he wants through us—is what the *Treasures of the Transformed Life* calls jumping in with both feet.

I can remember being in the pool at Lake Junaluska many years ago trying to convince Taylor to jump in. Even after assuring her that I would catch her and not let her sink to the bottom, she was still afraid to

make the plunge—to jump in with both feet so to speak. She preferred sitting on the edge of the pool with her feet dangling in the water. Maybe you've been in the same situation with your child or grandchild. They desperately want to jump into their parents arms but are afraid. Sometimes they shake and sometimes they cry.

I remember my biggest challenge came when I was in the fourth grade. I was at the local pool for a birthday party. All my friends were there and they seemed to take to the water like little fish. This was my first experience with a pool since taking lessons as a small child. After living three years in the desert on an Indian reservation and not having the opportunity to be in the water very much, I was somewhat uncomfortable in water. To make matters worse, this pool had a high dive that was 20 feet above the water. All my friends were jumping and diving from it and were pushing me to do the same. Finally, I got up enough nerve to climb the ladder but once I was on the platform, I couldn't convince myself to jump. When I looked over the edge, it seemed like a mile to the water. I eventually climbed back down without jumping. I did this several times before I got up enough nerve to take the plunge. Once I finally did jump, you couldn't get me off the high dive.

### **TAKING THE PLUNGE**

The question for us, disciples of Jesus Christ, is when are we going to stop dangling our feet and sticking our toes in the water and jump into God's river? God knows you want to take the plunge. When you do, you will climb the ladder to do it over and over again.

I know many of you have read Charles Frazier's incredible novel *Cold Mountain*. If so, maybe you remember the scene where Ruby, a woman who has spent all of her life secrets of the land and its gifts, tests Ada, a woman from the city, to see if she is starting to learn about the farm and the land.

*... You say you want to get to know the running of this land, Ruby said.*

*... Yes, Ada said.*

*Ruby rose and knelt behind Ada and cupped her hands over Ada's eyes.*

*... Listen, Ruby said. Her hands were warm and rough over Ada's face. They smelled of hay, tobacco leaves, flour, and something deeper, a clean animal smell. Ada felt their then bones against her fluttering eyes.*

*... What do you hear? Ruby said. Ada heard the sound of wind in the trees, the dry rattle of their late leaves. She said as much.*

*... Trees, Ruby said contemptuously, as if she had expected just such a foolish answer. Just general trees is all? You've got a long way to go.*

*She removed her hands and took her seat and said nothing more on the topic, leaving Ada to conclude that what she meant was that this is a particular world. Until Ada could listen, and at the bare minimum tell the sound of the poplar from the oak at this time of year when it was easiest to do, she had not even started to know the place.<sup>1</sup>*

Like Ada, we think we know the lay of the land and can tell the difference between the voice of God and the other voices that call out to us. We think we are like Ruby but I wonder if we are that attentive.

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Frazier, *Cold Mountain* (New York, NY: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1997), 227-228.

Finding the God who is everywhere and in everything takes attentiveness. In order to be an attentive follower and disciple of Jesus Christ, we have to jump in with both feet. We must let God's river of grace carry us to the place where we are aware of the call, responsibility and action that it takes to have a life transformed by Christ.

Let me take a few moments to suggest what it takes to jump in with both feet.

## **FAMILY**

First, when you become a part of the community of faith at Central you become a part of family that is tied together by the call of Jesus Christ. This call means that we work together and play together. We believe that Jesus calls us to make disciples; show compassion to the needy, hungry and sick; raise up children in the way of the Lord; encourage one another and worship together.

Ann Lamont describes what it means to be a church family in her book, *Traveling Mercies*. She writes:

*When my (my pastor Veronica) was about 7, her best friend got lost one day. The little girl ran up and down the streets of her big town where they lived, but she couldn't find a single landmark. She was very frightened. Finally a policeman stopped to help her. He put her in the passenger seat of his car, and they drove around until finally she saw her church. She pointed it out to the policeman, and then she told him firmly, "YOU COULD LET ME OUT NOW. THIS IS MY CHURCH, AND I CAN ALWAYS FIND MY WAY HOME FROM HERE."*

*"And that is why I have stayed so close to mine—because no matter how bad I am feeling, how lost or lonely or frightened,*

*when I see the faces of the people at my church, and hear their tawny voices, I can always find my way home.<sup>2</sup>*

The church is the place we can come back to when we are lost. The church is a community of faith that reaches down and picks us up when we stumble. The family helps us find new direction when we go astray.

## **ENCOURAGEMENT**

It should go without saying that the church should be a place of encouragement. The church knows nothing of tearing down and unwarranted criticism. The church is about building lives not destroying them.

We see this when Paul writes the church in Ephesus. He wants to encourage them in a difficult situation. They surely weren't doing everything right but he reminds them that they are adopted children of God and recipients of God's grace through Jesus Christ.

After my sermon last week on prayer, LeeAnn, our director, gave me a book called *Messy Spirituality*. After reading the passage she had marked, I ended up reading the rest of the book. Michael Yaconelli tells this story in the fourth chapter about a ten year old who brought his mother, father, both grandparents, and three uncles and aunts to watch him play in the little league championship game.

It was the last inning and the little boy's team was down one run. The bases were loaded, there were two outs, and the boy who had brought the large family was at bat. If he walked or hit the ball, he would be the hero of the game. Unfortunately, he struck out and the other team won. Yaconelli writes:

*Carl was still standing at the plate, devastated, alone, his head down in disgrace.*

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<sup>2</sup>Ann Lamont, *Traveling Mercies* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1999), 55.

*Suddenly someone yelled, “Okay, Carl, play ball!” Startled, Carl looked up to see his family spread out over the field. Grandpa was pitching, Dad was catching, Mom was at first base. Uncle David was at second, and the rest of the family had covered the other positions.*

*“Come on, Carl, pick up the bat. Grandpa’s pitching.”*

*Bewildered, Carl slowly picked up the bat and swung Grandpa’s first pitch.*

Yaconelli goes on to describe how Carl misses the next six pitches but finally hits the seventh. It ended up being a home run. Yaconelli then closes the story:

*Before he knew what happened, Carl found himself being carried around on Uncle David’s shoulders while the rest of the family crowded around cheering Carl’s name.*

*One person who was watching this amazing event commented to a friend, “I watched a little boy fall victim to a conspiracy of grace!”<sup>3</sup>*

The church is the place where people fall victim to a conspiracy of grace.

## **TEAMWORK**

The church is a family; it encourages and comes together in teams in order to facilitate God’s Kingdom work. Teamwork means we all do our part. We are all spiritually gifted in some significant way and we are called to share those gifts in the most appropriate place alongside others who have similar interests and goals. In fact, teamwork doesn’t work

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<sup>3</sup>Michael Yaconelli, *Messy Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 66-67.

unless we do our part. It's amazing the difference it can make when we do.

Again, Michael Yaconelli tells a great story. *During the last months of World War II*, he writes, *the British conducted daily bombing raids over Berlin.*

*The bombers would take off from an airstrip in England and fly to Berlin accompanied by fighters. One night after a successful bombing raid, the bombers were attacked by German fighters. One of the English bombers, unfortunately, was separated from the rest of the bombers and fighters. It was all alone. Suddenly they were being attacked by a German fighter. They prepared for the worst. The tracer bullets starting whizzing by and suddenly the plane was hit by five bullets slamming into the big slow bomber. The crew braced for the explosion that they knew would come. But it never happened and the plane flew safely back to England.*

*A few hours after they landed, mechanics pulled the found the five unexploded bullets in the plane's fuel tank. They handed them to the pilot who carefully opened them. To the pilot and mechanic's amazement each one was empty of gunpowder. Instead, inside each bullet was a tiny wad of paper. We the pilot unfolded the paper he found a note that read, "We are polish POWs—forded to make bullets in a factory. When guards do not look, we do not fill with powder. Is not much, but is best we can do. Please tell family we are alive."*

*The notes were signed by four Polish prisoners of war.<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 108-109.

Teamwork is about doing the little things together, the little acts, and small responses to God's presence in our lives so that others might know of God's incredible work in our community and world.

## **CELEBRATE**

Finally, Jumping in with both feet means we celebrate together God's presence in our midst. We do that through worship. Without corporate worship, all the other things will fall short. We are here to praise God for his incredible works in our lives, to give thanks and ask for God's ongoing help and guidance.

The Westminster Catechism reminds us—*“The chief purpose of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.* The Ten Commandments of Moses instruct us to *“Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.”* Worship is about God. It isn't about how we dress, what kind of music, the style of worship or the symbols. The devil, unfortunately, has a way of distracting us with all kinds of unnecessary objections and resistance. We have three distinct services at Central and they all celebrate God's presence and work in their own way.

The movie, *Places in the Heart*, starring Sally Field begins in a church with people singing, *“This is my story, this is my song, Praising my Savior, all the day long.”* It ends in the same church with people singing the same song. In between, Sally Field's husband is killed, her black farmhand is beaten and driven away and she nearly loses her farm—but in the end they are all back in church singing, *“Blessed assurance Jesus is Mine! O what a fortaste of glory divine.”*

We have a reason to jump in with both feet. God's grace is sufficient. Coming together as a community of faith, encouraging one another, working together and celebrating God's presence in worship, will make a difference in your life and in the lives of others. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.