

March 26, 2006 (4th Sunday of Lent)
“A Quest for Life - A Quest for God” (John 10:10)
Mark 4:5, 6, 16, 17
Discipleship

The theme for our sermons during Lent have been something everyone is in search of... A quest for life, a life with purpose and meaning. Everyone needs a reason to live. Jesus said (John 10:10), “...I came to give life — life in all its fullness.” (THE MESSAGE says it like this) “I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of.”

Our quest for life begins with Jesus because He is the only way to God and life can only be found in God. He is life. God created you, He has given you life. You exist because God willed for you to exist. You were made by God and, therefore you were made for God, and until you understand that, life will never make sense. A quest for life is a quest for God... because life (physical, spiritual and eternal life) is given by God and is found in God.

God loves you and has a plan for your life, He wants you to be in an intimate relationship with Him that He may reveal His plan to you. Only one thing separates you from a holy God...Sin. There is nothing you can do on your own to be forgiven of sin. You can't make up for it by doing good things or being religious. So, how do you enter into a relationship with God? There is only one Way...through Jesus Christ. (Acts 4:12 NCV) “Jesus is the only One who can save people. His name is the only power in the world that has been given to save people. We must be saved through him.”

This is what Lent is all about; a time to reflect on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. When you ask Jesus to be your Savior (i.e.) when you accept that His death on the cross was a sacrifice He made for you personally, to pay for your sins; and when you ask and trust Him to forgive you, He does. Then with sin forgiven you find Life (i.e.) you enter into a relationship with a holy God through Jesus. Jesus is Life. Knowing God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) is life. God the Holy Spirit comes to live in you (the first deposit guaranteeing Eternal Life). That is where your quest for God begins with faith in Jesus (Salvation)...but that is only the beginning.

Jesus must not only be your Savior, He must be your Lord. That means coming to a place in your spiritual walk where you surrender your whole life (past, present and future) and every area of your life to Jesus and put it under His authority. You allow Him to hold the keys to the business...the business of your life. When we make this full, whole-hearted commitment to Jesus we are entirely sanctified by God or entirely set apart for God and empowered to grow in Christ-likeness. This too is not the end of our quest. We continue to grow in our knowledge of God through Christ and experience life.

(Mark 8:34-37 NCV) Then Jesus called the crowd to him, along with his followers. He said, "If people want to follow me, they must give up the things they want. They must be willing even to give up their lives to follow me. Those who want to save their lives will

give up true life. But those who give up their lives for me and for the Good News will have true life. It is worth nothing for them to have the whole world if they lose their souls. They could never pay enough to buy back their souls.

Sanctification has a starting place which is making a decision in a moment of time that you are going to live a life totally devoted to serving and obeying God. This is the condition for a life better than you ever dreamed off...you must yield all to Jesus. He must hold the keys to not just part of your life but all of it. You make that decision in a moment but the working out of that decision is a process of the rest of your life.

I have often compared this to a marriage. On the wedding day you make a commitment. You promise to be faithful for better or for worse, in good times and in rough times, in sickness and in health, whether richer or poorer. That is a vow you make in a moment of time on the wedding day. But the working out of that vow is the marriage, which is meant to be for the rest of your life. Everyday you must put into practice a life of love and faithfulness to your spouse in practical terms just as you promised to do on the day you wed.

Sanctification is making a vow to be faithful to God for better or for worse, in good times and in rough times, in sickness and in health, whether richer or poorer. We can make that promise in a moment of time. But the practical and specific working out of that promise is a process that will take all of your life.

I am calling that **process, discipleship**. God's part is saving and sanctifying us. Our part is to discipline ourselves. The Bible says to work out your salvation, it says train yourself for godliness. Jesus said if we love Him and want to remain in His love we must obey Him.

You might remember comedian Yakov Smirnoff. When he first came to the United States from Russia he was not prepared for the incredible variety of instant products available in American grocery stores. He says, "On my first shopping trip, I saw powdered milk--you just add water, and you get milk.

Then I saw powdered orange juice--you just add water, and you get orange juice. And then I saw baby powder, and I thought to my self, What a country!"

Smirnoff is joking but we make these assumptions about Christian Transformation—that people change instantly at salvation...and ... Sanctification...most...expect some quick fix to sin...We go to church as if we are going to the grocery store: Powdered Christian. Just add water and disciples are born not made.

Unfortunately, there is no such powder and disciples of Jesus Christ are not instantly born. They are slowly raised through many trials, suffering, and temptations. A study has found that only 11 percent of churchgoing teenagers have a well-developed faith, rising to only 32 percent for churchgoing adults. Why? Because true-life change only begins at salvation, (and sanctification) takes more than just time, is about training, trying, suffering, and even dying (adapted from James Emery White, *Rethinking the Church*, Baker, 1997, p. 55-57).

Why is it that some people have an experience of putting faith in Christ, and are very enthusiastic at first about the Christian life, but then appear to cool down, give up or even fall away? Perhaps this is what Jesus was describing in my text for today:

Mark 4:5, 6, 16, 17 NLT

“Other seed fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The plant sprang up quickly, but it soon wilted beneath the hot sun and died because the roots had no nourishment in the shallow soil... The rocky soil represents those who hear the message and receive it with joy. But like young plants in such soil, their roots don't go very deep. At first they get along fine, but they wilt as soon as they have problems or are persecuted because they believe the word.”

Jesus says there are people who hear the message and receive it with joy. They start off the Christian life with enthusiasm. But there is a problem. What is the problem with? The plant shoots up. What we see above the soil looks good. So where is the problem? The roots! The roots don't go very deep, the roots are not strong. Where are the roots of a plant? Under ground...unseen. It is the part of the Christian life which no one else can see that needs to be made stronger. It is your secret life with God -that only God sees - that must be nourished. We judge by outward appearances. A person comes to church, gives an offering to the church, speaks good “Christianese” and everything looks ok. But how that plant does when the sun threatens to suck the moisture out of it is the real test. What happens when you have problems, persecution or temptation? We must make the roots strong by nurturing the secret life with God. Don't worry about the outside. You don't grow the plant. You don't produce the fruit...God does that ... it is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, He produces it not you. If you plant a tree in the right soil, in the right location to get the right amount of sun. If you fertilize it and water it, it will grow all by itself. Why? Because the roots are firmly established. Because you are taking care of what can't be seen under the ground ...the roots so that they may have life in them and if life is in the roots how will you know? You will see fruit.

We make the mistake of looking on the outside. But real change happens from the inside out.

So what does this mean for us? What can we do to have strong roots? First make that commitment that you are going to yield yourself totally and always to the authority of Jesus. Remember the commitment you make and be determined that you are going to stay faithful to that commitment no matter what. We must read the Bible and pray regularly, you cannot have an intimate relationship with God without it. But you must also obey what you read and not just when people are watching, but especially when no one but God is watching. Your life in private must match your life in public. Come to church, do good deeds but do it with the right motive. Do it for God. Do it not to be seen by others but for God. (Matt 6:1 NCV) "Be careful! When you do good things, don't do them in front of people to be seen by them. If you do that, you will have no reward from

your Father in heaven.” What is Jesus emphasizing? The secret life with God. Doing things to please God and nurturing that secret life with God.

Let the Word of God correct you. God wants to correct you , but you must love to be corrected. I want God to show me from His word where I am failing Him. And when you fail God, immediately repent. Repentance is “a change of mind and a corresponding change of life.” We all need to learn to repent. Repentance is the only way to grow. If you are a disciple of Jesus the Holy Spirit will regularly prompt change and you will have regular changes of mind and corresponding changes in life. It will be an ongoing thing...for the rest of your earthly life. Our secret life with God means we remain humble, broken and teachable before God. You must pray, “Oh, God please keep changing me.” We will never arrive spiritually. The quest for God continues as we nourish our secret life with God. Keep the “roots” the unseen life with God strong. Nurture your relationship with Him, doing the things that keep that relationship close, strong, and healthy.