

Who Are We Part V: Paying It Forward
Luke 12:13-21, 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

April 6, 2014

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A friend of mine was walking through the mall one day when he bumped into a family from his church. The dad of the family was carrying the little boy of the family on his shoulders. The little boy was three, maybe four years of age. On his father's shoulders he was taller than my friend, who is about 6'4" tall.

Looking up at the boy my friend said to him, "My goodness, aren't you a big boy!" The little boy smiled and then said astutely, "This is not all me!"

I love that story because it serves to remind me that no matter what I am able to accomplish, no matter how successful I may become, I need to regularly remind myself, "This is not all me."

I am a product of others in my life who have supported me and encouraged me, tolerated me and even chided me from time to time. It goes all the way back to when I was born. I was raised by wonderful, loving parents. Soon after my birth I was baptized at Versailles Methodist Church. At my baptism, after my parents stated their vows, the people of my church said in unison,
"With God's help, we will so order our lives that this child, Edward David Streets, surrounded by steadfast love, may be established in the faith in the way that leads to life eternal."

We will so order our lives – surrounded by steadfast love – may be established in the faith in the way that leads to life eternal.

My parents' brothers and sisters in Christ were saying, "We're not going to let this one get away!"

Many of those people became my Sunday school teachers. One became my Scout Master. They taught me faith in Jesus Christ in the midst of a small group of other children.

My life was influenced by other adults, by elementary school teachers and high school teachers, college and seminary professors, each of whom helped

in some way to shape my life so that I might inch closer and closer to becoming the person God wanted me to be, the person God hoped I would become when God created me.

You have impacted my life as well, in profound ways. I've had the privilege of serving with you, hearing your thoughts and opinions, debating decisions that needed to be made. I've been a grateful recipient of your prayers and encouragement. I am blessed, even honored to be your pastor, to be the senior pastor of Ingomar Church. But I need you to know that when you look at me on Sunday mornings, or whenever, for better or worse, this is not all me. You are up here with me. I stand on your shoulders and the shoulders of all of those who have come before me.

You know the same can be said of you, right? You know that you do not stand alone, right? No matter how successful you are, no matter how gifted you are, no matter what obstacles you have overcome, no matter what you have achieved in life, you do not stand alone. You stand on the shoulders of others. Sometimes we forget that.

Even if you are the most gifted, most talented, most successful person in the room, you do not stand alone. Rather, you stand on the shoulders of others. That God-given talent that you possess came to you through your parents. It may be genetic. Of course you used it wisely, but it's still a gift. Likewise, your life has been profoundly impacted by others; teachers, leaders, mentors, guides. You do not stand alone.

The same can be said of us as a church. It's obvious that as a church that celebrated 175 years of ministry and service a few years ago, we stand on the shoulders of others.

“We have been recipients of grace upon grace from God, and from others. We are the heirs, the beneficiaries of those who came before us who were touched by the generosity of Christ enough to give graciously so that we could experience the truth of Christ for ourselves...”

Schnase p. 116

Each time we are here and every time we celebrate our knowledge of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, we benefit from those who have come before us.

Imagine what it must have been like when this church began. This was a rural community made up of farms, farmers, and their families. Churches

existed in that day but they were pretty far away. So some families came together with a vision and a plan to have a church somewhere in the vicinity of Pine Creek. They prayed for God's wisdom and direction.

They pooled their resources. I wonder what that was like. "I can provide some lumber." "I have some slate I was saving for my barn." "My team of horses can excavate the sight." "We can have work days until we are done."

Why did they do all this? Because they wanted a place where they could gather, welcome one another and worship together. They wanted a place where they and their children could learn about God's love for them, and for all of humanity from people who could instruct them. Their love for their neighbor, their actual next-farm-over neighbor led them to want to be together on the Lord's Day. They wanted others to learn of God's love as well. They remembered the 4th Commandment:

"Remember to observe the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy. Six days a week are set apart for your daily duties and regular work, but the seventh day is a day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God. On that day no one in your household may do any kind of work."

Exodus 20:8-10b.

I can imagine there were many Sunday mornings when farmers awakened, milked their cows and thought, "I have so much work to do! I could use the time. I'd beat church to do stuff around here." Then they came to their senses, remembered all that God had done for them and said to themselves, "It's just a couple of hours and I'll be glad I went. Besides, I could use a good word today!"

The community grew and so did the church. One building was replaced by another and then another and then another. They reminded themselves again and again, it is not about the buildings. But it was never about the buildings. It was always about providing places where unbelievers could be introduced to God and where believers could continuously grow in their relationship with Jesus. It was about Sunday school classes, and class meetings, and small groups so people could learn about and be encouraged in their faith. It was about children in the community coming to learn about a God who loved them. It was about caring for others and loving neighbor as Jesus did. It was about identifying needs and trying to meet those needs whether they be local or distant, national or international.

It was also about sharing out of abundance and blessing. They gave because they wanted to give.

“For God so loved the world he gave...” John 3:16

And so they gave of themselves, their time, their ability, their resources, because they knew that life is better when Christ is at the center and they wanted to see the people they knew and the people they hadn't even met yet grow deeper and stronger in their relationship with Jesus.

And so church, what you see, what you experience...this is not all us. We stand on the shoulders of others. They have poured their lives into ours so that we might align ourselves with them.

WE BELIEVE THAT LIFE IS BETTER WHEN CHRIST IS AT THE CENTER, THEREFORE WE EXIST TO LEAD PEOPLE INTO A DEEPER RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST.

We want to invite others to discover Jesus or reacquaint themselves with Jesus and to experience church with us. We want to be welcoming, friendly and accepting of others. We want others to feel like they are important because they are important to us and to God.

“Accept one another as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.” Romans 15:7

We want to worship together every single Sunday unless we are sick or on vacation.

“Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere.” Psalm 84:10a

We want to realize the value of learning about Jesus and going deeper with Jesus and with others through a small group. Remember, we were not created to do life alone. Think of the early church:

“They devoted themselves to the Apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship...and everyone was filled with awe.” Acts 2:42, 43a

We want to be people who recognize needs and serve others. Can you recall some of the places where people from our church serve? Bethany House, Kenya, Habitat, Northside Soup Kitchen, Ingomar Living Waters, Ingomar Child Enrichment Center, Philippi, West Virginia, Pleasant Valley Men's Shelter, etc., etc., etc. People who serve in these and other areas get it. They hear the voice of Jesus.

“For in as much as you did it for one of the least of these brothers or sisters of mine, you did it to me!”

Our appreciation of God’s unparalleled love for us leads us to love God in return. Because we love God we want to please God with our lives. Therefore our love for God evolves into an increasing love for others and that ignites into a burning desire to serve others. We are people who desire to make a difference.

“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant.”
Matthew 20:26b

We are so blessed by God that we want to return thanks to God by paying it forward. We do it with our love, our time, our abilities, our giftedness and talent and our resources.

“God so loved the world that he gave...” John 3:16a

Therefore we want to give as well.

We stand on the shoulders of others. Don’t we want to do the same to future generations. We have worshipped in sanctuaries and worship spaces that we did not build and so to us falls the privilege of building sanctuaries and worship spaces and churches where others may come and find Jesus and worship and grow.

We want to be people who are so grateful to God for what God has done for us that we become people who are cheerful givers. We want to be fellow believers who pay it forward with a smile on our face and joy in our hearts.

Remember the rich fool? He has so much; he’s had such a good year that he doesn’t know what to do with all he has. Poor guy! He needs more space so he can keep more stuff. Does that describe us?

Instead of bigger barns do we want bigger homes, more garage space for more cars, more closet space for clothing? Listen. I understand. I get it. I want that stuff too, but not at the expense of leading people to Jesus, of creating places for learning and fellowship, worshipping God and serving others. Not at the expense of being the person God created me to be.

“A person’s life does not exist in the abundance of his possessions.”
Luke 12:15c

Paul encourages us to be cheerful givers. He writes,

“Everyone should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

II Corinthians 9:7

When you give, are you smiling on the outside? On the inside?

Listen to what Paul writes a few sentences later:

“This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God’s people but also is overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, people will praise God for the obedience which accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.”

II Corinthians 9:7

Would you like the Cliff Notes version of that? Because of you, because of your expressions of thanks, people will find their way to God.

I want us to be people who express their thanks to God by serving others and by giving to others. I want that desire to serve and to give to burn inside us because we are so grateful to God for what God’s done for us. That’s who we are at Ingomar Church, people who make a difference, people who want to continue to make a difference. Because of you, Ingomar Church, people will find their way to God.