

THOUGHTS

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SPEAKER ON THE WORD TODAY

D GOD GETS GREAT THINGS DONE WITH SMALL ARMIES

The cultural winds are whipping harshly against God's House, the Church. The Wolf (Satan) is trying his best to huff and puff and blow the Church down. Nationally, the Church stumbled badly with 25% of worshipers disappearing after the Covid debacle. I thought Our Shepherd Lutheran was composed of a higher caliber of Christians, but our congregation has lost 25% from the pews as well. It is telling that not that much has changed regarding the offerings and work done for the Kingdom. The majority of those who dropped their worship commitment were not doing much for the Kingdom. That may sound harsh, but it's true. Those who care to be effective for Christ returned, and those for whom it is not so important drifted away. A few are physically absent but faithful in supporting the Kingdom work.

The work goes on! Just as several times in the Old Testament – I think especially of how the Lord whittled down Gideon's army to just 300 men (See Judges chapters 6-7) – God gave victory through his power, not man's strength - so it is with The Word Today. Our army is not large. It is composed of the Partners of TWT and the congregation, but together we are enabled by God to do the miraculous, reaching millions with the news of Jesus! Thank the Lord! He is giving us success!

M IT'S ABOUT COMMITMENT, NOT CONVENIENCE

Jesus calls people to discipleship, which I like to describe as apprenticeship, modeling after Him. A master tradesman shares knowledge, habits, and attitudes with the novice so that the beginner will advance. Notice the root of the word disciple is the same as the word discipline. Discipleship is about learning spiritual habits, disciplines. Think of your disciplines of life, diet, exercise, budgeting, and maintaining communication, to name a few. The disciplines of faith are also activities borne out of a desire to develop spiritually. Some of the Christian disciplines are prayer, familiarization with the Word, worship, offerings, and serving others including giving to those in need and using one's gifts and talents to help others.

We do not develop physically, intellectually, or spiritually if we do not discipline ourselves. Initially, self-discipline is uncomfortable and hard work, and that is why parents must force children to learn it! Some people remain immature well into their mid-life because they do not wish to become disciplined, and they often suffer the consequences of the lack of self-discipline.

Often, the activities which must be done as we discipline ourselves do not get easier with time, but we get tougher, and more committed to it. Exercise is a good example of this principle. About two years ago I started working out every Thursday on a step mill (stair machine which

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*The Bible is God's Word...Jesus is God's "Word" made flesh...
His death and resurrection, the message needed Today.*

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has rotating, infinite steps such that a person can walk in place up steps for as long as an hour). One might think that after two years the workout might become significantly easier. No, it has not. However, my endurance following that day's exercise is greatly improved. The discipline is difficult, and I expect it always will be hard. But the benefit is more energy as I recover throughout the day, a benefit well worth the effort. Likewise, the work associated with commitment to God remains challenging at times, but in the process of doing that work, we are changed. I am reminded that the word in Greek for "liturgy" means work! We work our way through confession of sins, prayers, hymns, and songs to praise God, confession of our faith, attending to the sermon, and other acts of worship (Note: At Our Shepherd, we always open our Bibles during the sermon to disciple. It's despicable how many Pastors and Priests fail to train the congregation during that gift of time to disciple them). It's not a chore but a discipline that molds our faith. In committing ourselves to physical discipline we get more endurance and strength, and if the commitment is spiritual, we get spiritual development such as understanding of God's holy will, trust, patience, and kindness. By discipling we draw closer to God in our thinking, communication, and actions.

When I was younger I did not like discipline because I wanted everything to be easy to attain. As I age, I have grown to accept self-discipline. I don't know if I will ever be mature enough to love it. One of the highest compliments regarding leadership and preaching that I receive occasionally is to the effect, "You really want us to grow, to develop!" Yes, precisely, that is my call and my desire, that everyone at Our Shepherd is discipling, growing, and becoming more useful to Christ for His Kingdom! Those who make the commitment grow in spiritual maturity and become more useful to Christ for His Kingdom! You know whether you are useful to Christ or not. Let this be an encouragement that if you have the desire to be useful to Christ, you start with the spiritual disciplines above.

SNOW, GIFTS, GIVING, TIME

As it is Christmas time, I recall that as a child snow was very important because it meant playtime. As I got older, gifts were very important because there were always some toys I wanted. As I kept maturing, giving a good gift, that is, one that was appropriate for the recipient, became more important. I wanted to show that I could surprise them and please them with the gift. As a father, it became important to give gifts that would develop our sons, ones that would make them better individuals. The older I get, the more important spending time with family becomes. The most precious thing now is celebrating Christ, our great Christmas gift from the Father, and making memories because our loved ones, or perhaps I, won't be here forever.

Blessings,
Douglas W. Schroeder