

I can't help but be thankful and excited about Advent starting next week and for the chance to see my family this coming week. This Wednesday my brother will arrive from Reno to stay with us overnight. I'll watch Miracle on 34th Street - the 1st movie in our Advent Sermon Series starting next week "Christ in Christmas movies" - and then VERY early on Thursday I'll put the turkey in to cook. I can already taste the turkey, gravy and pumpkin pie.

Two weeks ago I performed the wedding ceremony for my nephew so he and his new wife and his wife's mother will also join us for Thanksgiving. As well as my oldest brother and his wife.

When I think of ALL this, the phrase from scripture today - "The one who sows sparingly will reap sparingly; the one who sows bountifully will reap bountifully" - seems to come alive for me. Over the years I've been carefully tending the garden that is my family. Not only do I make sure and attend family gatherings, but sometimes I host them. When Covid had us shut in our homes, just like for many of you - my three brothers, mom and Dad and I took to Zoom, meeting once a week to check in and see how we were all doing. We continue to this day - every Saturday that we are able - at 4:30 p.m. - I get to see my brother even though he's in Reno, my Mom & Dad though they are housebound in Torrance and my two other brothers here in So Cal. Last year, my youngest brother was living in Guam for his work and he also zoomed with us once a week. That's the one thing I can be thankful about from Covid - it taught my family new ways to stay connected.

This phrase is scripture about reaping what we sow - I like how John Wesley described it - He said, "A general rule. God will proportion the reward to the work, and the temper whence it proceeds."

Generally this is true. But I'll throw a small wrench in the works and say that in our intertwining lives, not only do we reap what we sow - in other words our future consequences are shaped by our present actions, but future consequences for OTHERS are also shaped by present actions of OTHERS. Even though we might work hard at nurturing something, someone else's efforts to thwart it or just their inaction can also affect the outcome. And vice versa.

Did you know that November 23 is an important anniversary in the history of Christianity in Japan? In 1549, Frances Xavier, a Jesuit missionary, arrived in Japan.¹ He met some people who had known of Jesus from ancestral sources. Many of those people responded with enthusiasm to Xavier's evangelistic efforts and accepted Christ as their Savior. Within one year, 10,000 people there were following Christ and eventually, 3 million became part of the movement. That time in Japan was dubbed "The Christian Century". But at the end of the 16th century, the government unleashed a persecution against the church which destroyed organized Christianity - the government retaliation began on November 23, 1596 when 26 indigenous Japanese Christians were arrested in Kyoto. By the following February they were all crucified on a hill outside Nagasaki. The youngest of them was twelve years old. This became known as the Kirishtan Holocaust. Some say 10,000 Japanese Christians were murdered and others say the number was closer to a million. Indeed - as a community we all reap what we all sow.

But here is another true story to bolster the positive side of reaping what we sow told by the famous pastor of Moody Church in Chicago - Harry Ironside.²

Harry's parents, John and Sophia Ironside, were passionate workers as Christians, but when Harry's father died, suddenly, at age 27, when Harry was just 6, of typhoid fever, his mother had to raise Harry and his brother without any income. The boys watched their mother closely as children. Harry remembered one time, when they were out of food, his mother prayed about their need and waited for God to act. The answer didn't come immediately, but one morning soon after she had them sit at the table for breakfast with empty plates and only water in their cups. His mother, Sophia Ironside, said a prayer anyway - "Father, you promised in your Word that bread will be given us and water will be plentiful. Lord, we have the water and we thank you for it. And now we trust You for the bread or for that which will take its place." As she finished praying - true story -

¹ Robert J. Morgan, Nelson's Annual Preacher's Sourcebook (Nashville, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), pg. 350

² Ibid, pg. 355

the doorbell rang. It was a man who said, “Mrs. Ironside, I feel very bad. We’ve been owing you for months for that dress you made for my wife. We still don’t have any money to pay you, but we just harvested our potatoes and wondered if you’d take a bushel or two on account of the bill.” She immediately fried the potatoes up for a delicious breakfast.

Psalm 126:6 reminds us, “Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.” And Galatians 6:7 thru 9 you’ll know - “Do not be deceived; God is not mocked; for you reap whatever you sow. If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest-time if we do not give up.” I think NOT GIVING UP is the key. So often we go about the work we must do - finishing proposals for work, getting ready to lead important meetings, making meals for our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, cleaning up after our family, fixing what’s broken at home, at church or with our car. We do the work and can say at the end of the day that we are tired, because we worked hard. But inside, when we’re really honest, inside we HAVE given up before we even began. We don’t really believe it means anything or gets us anywhere except getting through the next minute, hour or day.

Do not be deceived - God is not mocked. We reap what we sow - especially what we sow in the Spirit.

What is in your Spirit this Thanksgiving? Are you embracing the weariness of the soul as well as the weariness of the body? Or are you enduring and sowing to the Spirit? - Let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest-time if we do not give up.

2 Peter 3:8 reminds us, “Do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like one day.” Only God knows when that harvest-time will be.

I know I said this when I first arrived, but I haven’t mentioned it for a while - I’ve been working on nurturing a sabbath rest once a week as the Bible tells us

to do. Thursday evening after work thru Friday, I make an effort to not just “take a day off,” but to stop working - whether paid or unpaid work - and truly rest from the busyness and anxiety of life. I find ways to delight in the life God continues to give me and experience joy. The next day, Saturday, I resume life, working from this rest rather than needing to rest from my work. Of course some weeks are different, but this has become my habit most weeks.

This is significant to my sermon today, because the way I begin my sabbath is to go outside in my backyard around 6:30 or 7:00 on Thursday night with a candle, a snack and a beverage and I watch on YouTube the shabbat service recorded the week prior at Stephen Wise Temple in Los Angeles. I’ve been doing this for a little over a year now. I’ve learned so much about our Jewish heritage participating in worship that way and listening to the Rabbi’s messages. I say heritage since we are adopted as heirs of God through Jesus and Judaism was our beginning as Christians.

This past week as I participated in the shabbat service, I was reminded of a very consequential incident in history that speaks to this notion that we all reap what we all sow together in life. That incident was “Kristallnacht” or Night of the Broken Glass November 9 & 10, 1938 in Germany. That night and next day, in an organized effort, the Nazi Party’s paramilitary forces and civilians torched and vandalized more than a thousand synagogues, Jewish businesses, schools, hospitals and homes while police and fire companies stood by, following instructions to let the buildings burn. Close to 100 Jewish people were killed and some 30 thousand Jewish men were arrested then and sent to concentration camps. Though German Jews had been under repressive policies before that, they’d mostly been nonviolent. But after Kristallnacht, the situation deteriorated until Hitler began what he called the “Final Solution”, resulting in the Holocaust.

Rabbi Yoshi Zweiback at Stephn Wise Temple pointed out two important ideas as he spoke about Kristallnacht. First he said the painful reality was that the recent Jewish massacres in synagogues in Pittsburgh in 2018 and the one 6 month later in Poway, which was just 20 minutes from our previous home in San Diego,

those shootings have many American Jewish communities questioning now whether or not America is truly different, truly unique, when it comes to what he called “the world’s oldest hatred.” He voiced a deeply troubling statistic about the Holocaust. Since the end of World War II only approximately 30 thousand Righteous Gentiles have been identified. Righteous Gentiles, or Righteous Among the Nations, is an honorific used to describe non-Jews, gentiles, who risked their lives during the Holocaust to save Jewish lives. And even if that number of 30 thousand was off by a factor of 10 or even 100, if you look at that number as the percentage of Europe before the war, it’s a staggeringly insignificant number of people who were willing to risk their lives. There were 500 million people living in Europe in the beginning of the war so thirty thousand makes up .005 percent, which is another way of saying almost no one was willing to stand up and go to the aid of the Jewish people in the face of that pure evil. That horrifying reality suggests to Jewish people everywhere that if or when times truly get tough for them they really can not depend on or believe that fellow citizens will come to their aid.

Rabbi Yoshi’s second point is the “Ah ha!” in my message and will close my thoughts for today. Verse 10 & 11 in our passage today says - “God supplies seed to the sower and bread for food and will multiply our seed and increase the harvest of our righteousness. We will be enriched in every way for our great generosity, which produces thanksgiving to God.”

Most often God works THROUGH US - as we are willing - to get God’s work accomplished. It’s up to us to do the sowing. God doesn’t promise we will never see hardship or that we will always have plenty, but that through us, God is able to provide every blessing and that wherever we go and whatever does happen, God will always be there with us. It’s the faith that we’re not alone, because of the relationship we have with God and with one another. Only what’s sown is reaped.

Instead of sowing sparingly, let us sow bountifully that God’s good and pleasing will be done - for all people that we may change the present and the future.

May it be so. Amen.