

**TWO MEN IN CHAIRS: A CONVERSATION; MARK 10: 46-52;
10/25/15; MIKE REYNOLDS and PASTOR THOMAS YORTY;
WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

T: Mike, did you know today is Reformation Sunday?

M: I know what the Reformation is, what's Reformation Sunday?

T: We remember Luther and Calvin who reformed the church. They protested that Christianity had been reduced to Latin rituals and personal faith to a process of going through the motions.

You could say they reintroduced the practice of the great commandment 'to love God' and the second great commandment 'to love your neighbor.'

M: That sounds like spiritual growth and nurture to me. The Reformers got us back on track, living our faith rather than seeing it as superstition and obligation.

T: Exactly. Spiritual growth and nurture could be translated "Christian education"; but it's education that isn't limited to lectures and books; it includes mentors, friends who are willing to be open about their life journey. Each year, for example, members of our confirmation class choose a sponsor; that's the sponsor's job - to mentor and coach, to guide and support a young person as they consider what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

M: I was confirmed at Westminster. But to be perfectly honest I did not participate in any meaningful way in the life of the Church for many years. That was the last time I was really connected to Westminster or any church until about five years ago when I returned. I came back here, successful in outward appearance - career, family, material comfort but something was missing. I was spiritually bankrupt. And when I finally came back what I discovered, like the Prodigal Son, is that Westminster was here for me.

During that long time when I was "away" from the church my spiritual muscles atrophied. I was weak and searching and hungry. What we're saying today is that spiritual growth and nurture is learning how to re-connect with God and one another, with our neighbor; learning how follow Jesus with the help of one another.

T: That's very inspiring Mike, to hear you reflect on the significant role this church has played in your life. I'll be you're not alone. Lots of us have similar stories about how Westminster was there for us, held us up, brought us closer to our truest life - including, I might say, your pastor.

There are lots of ways that happens here: men's and women's retreats – getting away for a weekend from our busy lives and obligations to learn from one another; to hear how we each discover God's presence in our lives or how we experience God's absence in our lives; prayer groups, dream groups, book groups; Sunday morning bible study, spiritual life classes and the wonderful Case Library series. All of them are opportunities to build relationships with people we care about and who care about us and help us face the headwinds of life or tackle injustices in our community.

M: Doesn't preaching have something to do with 'spiritual growth and nurture'? You take a biblical reading and apply it to today's world?

T: That's exactly what it's about. The primary role of a minister in the Presbyterian Church is to teach. Clergy are referred to as 'teaching elders.'

M: So bringing this back full circle – Westminster is a place where people rediscover their faith, reconnect with God and find ways to serve our neighbor. In other words, how to love God and serve your neighbor.

T: Yes. And connecting this with last week which focused on Worship, Music and the Arts, a church is also a place where we give thanks and praise to God; if this life God invites us to have is the best path we can find and brings security and joy then we are compelled to thank the giver of that life – and not just thank God but find ways to express our awe at this power greater than any other that sustains people and communities.

M: You know, just being in this sanctuary helps me do that. The high ceilings, the stained glass windows, this chancel – it's a beautiful work of art that points to something greater, something bigger; there is a mystery and awe just sitting in this sanctuary if we're open to it; not to mention the music!

T: The founders of this church would be glad to hear you say that; I believe that's exactly what they wanted people to experience when they came into this building, something of the mystery and power of God.

M: So recapping again, our gratitude in action today is celebrating everything we have here at Westminster that deepens our spiritual understanding and commitment. And that deeper understanding and commitment enables us to fulfill the great commandment to love God; the more I know about God the more I love God. And then to fulfill the second greatest commandment – to serve our neighbor. The more I know about God the more I want others to also know and experience this life-giving power.

T: Preach it Mike!

M: Anything you would add?

- T: There's just one thing I can't resist on this Reformation Sunday: John Calvin, the founder of the Presbyterian church, was a great student of the bible. Just reading the bible he said is a revolutionary thing to do because it will change your life. In his day, very few people could read and the bible was published only in Latin which even fewer people could read. So Calvin and Luther translated the bible in the common language and Calvin in particular founded schools that taught people to read. He said, don't rely just on what the priest says the bible means, read it yourself.
- M: I like that idea that just reading the bible can change a person, but how does that change manifest itself in our daily lives?
- T: That's what I'm getting at. The more we know about God and Jesus the more our lives are transformed; we change from being self-serving so to speak to being other focused. Our angle of vision takes in more people and more issues; we become more aware of how our own conduct can lead or discourage people to follow Jesus.
- M: I'm with you – actions speak louder than words.
- T: Calvin's idea was that everything we do is an opportunity to point toward the God who gives us life.
- M: That's taking 'gratitude in action' almost literally. Every action could be one of gratitude. We fall short of that because we are human; but essentially the words I speak and the conduct of my life either reveal God's love or they don't.
- T: There you go again Mike, you're preaching; I love it!
- M: It could be an overwhelming idea – that every little thing I do is either a fulfilled or unfulfilled opportunity to reveal God. I have a hunch that God isn't looking for perfection in me, or even consistency. I think God rewards persistence and wants me to keep searching and seeking.
- T: Exactly! This is about progress not perfection; there is no replacement for a loving community of people in my life who understand and accept me and from whom I can learn and with whom I can share my own life struggles and joys. That's what we have here at Westminster.
- M: Perfect segue, Tom, to next week when we celebrate gratitude in every action again and focus on community. But there's one thing we both forgot to mention – how all this relates to giving.

T: Maybe we shouldn't assume people just make that connection. This place called Westminster which houses and sponsors so much that impacts our lives and this community doesn't have some hidden treasure chest or secret benefactor – everything here is possible because the people who were here before us gave generously and because all of us, in our time, have kept it going by giving time, talent and treasure.

M: Yeah, we all have places, organizations in our lives that we are associated with that only exist because people give what they can to keep the revenues ahead of the expenditures. When you think about what we've been talking about today, I don't know any organization as important as Westminster for the spiritual health and well-being of people.

T: Hey Mike, maybe we can get you in the pulpit next Sunday.

M: Not a chance. Next week, it's Sawrie Becker, my co-chair's turn to preach! I hope all of you will join us to hear from Sawrie – I know what she's going to tell you, you don't want to miss it!