

Deep in the Word – Paint by Numbers

July 9, 2017

An interactive devotional linked to Chandler First Church's July 9 Sunday morning sermon, "Paint By Numbers" based on Romans 7:14-25a; Matthew 11:25-30; Genesis 24:34-38; Psalm 45:10-17.

In the message, I shared some personal stories of frustrating experiences when either I or a member of my family was trying to do something, and being forced into a mold that did not fit. Think square peg being pounded into a round hole.

- Describe a time when you tried so hard and just nothing seemed to work:
- How did this make you feel?

A few years ago I saw the YouTube skit "Stop It" by Bob Newhart. If you have a computer, stop reading this right now and watch it. It won't be hard to find 😊

First off, this skit is funny because most of us can partly relate to the unreasonable fears that the client faces, but it allows us to laugh at *her*. Second, we feel compassion on her when the "expert" gives her bad advice—"Just stop it!" because we have all tried to do that and it just does not work!

- What else did you think of while you were watching?

Encounter the Word

Read Romans 7:14-25a.

- What is one of your biggest struggles?
- What New Year's resolution have you started with good intentions only to have it fizzle out?

Connect with God's Story

- Is the struggle here in verse 18 that Paul describes *before* he became a Christian . . . or the struggle *after* he became a Christian?
- If you feel that Paul is talking about his *before* (his pre Christian life), where did he get his "desire" to do good?
- If you think he is talking about his Christian life, why is he struggling when God is the new owner of his life?
- Have you ever reached the point where you cried out to God like Paul did in verse 24?
- Tell why you think God gave us the law:

Paul was brutally honest about his difficulties. He did not name them, but we can imagine that he faced the same kind of problems that most of us do, so his openness can be a model for us.

- In light of your own struggles with sin, how do you feel about Paul's conflict?
- HOW is this a model for a healthy, realistic self-image?
- What is the struggle in your spiritual life right now?

Engage with the Kingdom

Rest for the Weary

Read Matthew 11:25-30.

- How do you feel about that subtitle for this portion of scripture?
- Do you ever get weary trying to live a life of holiness?
- How about just trying to live your life?

“Yoke” is a bad word. Bad only because it signifies hard work, and if we are honest, most of us try to avoid a lot of that. But here our Lord is telling us that **when** we are weary and burdened, God will give us rest. The “yoke” part comes immediately after that comforting, hopeful promise about rest for our weariness. We put on that yoke, that tool for hard work **in order to** get that rest we so desperately need.

God says that after we buckle on those yoke straps, we **learn** from God **while** we are working with God. Facing in the same direction, walking in the same rows. Doing work **together**.

I think that most of us learn the best when we are with someone who already knows how to do what we are learning. By watching them, allowing them to correct us, practicing under the watchful eye of a master.

I know that is how I learned to knit—watching my mother knit, I decided I wanted to know how to do that. So then she showed my six-year-old hands how to hold the needles and the yarn and how to make stitches. What a mess! I did not learn how to knit **well** for about twenty years after that. At that time I was living in Oklahoma far from my mother and another woman in my church showed me some more advanced tricks, and I was off and running!

John Wesley exhorted and encouraged all members of the Church to practice spiritual disciplines. Think “yoke.” Think knitting. Doing the hard work of God in order to be learn **how** to be a part of that family.

So . . .

Spiritual Disciplines

- What would list as spiritual disciplines?
- If you had to “copy” someone’s life who you think of as a spiritual role model, what would you begin doing or not doing?

The reason for **practicing** spiritual disciplines is so that we can learn from God, while wearing God’s yoke. This week, what spiritual practice will you begin?

“You craft life from our mistakes.” “Second Chance” by Rend Collective Experiment, an Irish band.