

Title: "Recognizing Our 2D Tendencies"

Text: Luke 9:46-55

Turn with me today to the Gospel of Luke, 9:46-55.

We are continuing in our series of sermons called, "Living Faith in 3D."

- We are exploring the multi-dimensional nature of God, and of ourselves, and of the world around us.
- And we are discovering together just how wide and long and high and deep the love of God really is,
 - and seeking to know that love that surpasses knowledge so that we might be filled to the measure of the fullness of God.

That's quite a challenge!

- To know a love that is beyond knowledge;
- and to grasp a love that is wider and longer and higher and deeper than we could ever get our arms around.
- I think we have to admit that this seems beyond us much of the time.
 - We humans quite often find ourselves rather stuck in 2D.
- It's hard for us to keep the upward, inward, and outward dimensions of our lives flowing together seamlessly at the same time.

Listen now to Luke 9:46-55, and you might find that Jesus' first disciples had the same problem.

My friends, we often forget that the people Jesus chose to be his disciples, and even to form the leadership of his church,

- were not spiritually or emotionally mature.

They did not really understand Jesus, or what he had come to be or to do.

- They didn't really get the nature of God's kingdom.
- They weren't really functioning in a healthy way
 - upwardly in relation to God,
 - or inwardly in relation to their own souls,
 - or outwardly in relation to others in the world around them.

We find them here arguing with each other about which of them will be the greatest in the Kingdom.

And we find them putting down other people for casting out demons in Jesus' name,
-when those people are not part of their "in group" of specially chosen disciples.

And we find them wanting to call down fire from heaven to destroy a Samaritan village,
-because the people there wouldn't welcome them as they were passing through on their way to Jerusalem.

You can see Jesus just rolling his eyes, and shaking his head as he has to correct their thinking again and again.
-Sometimes, as here in verse 55, he has to outright rebuke his disciples.

You see, they have caught a glimpse of the "upward dimension" of a 3D life of faith,
-but they want to use that upward dimension for their own ends.
-They want to call on God to come down and destroy a whole village of people who were not welcoming to them.

And they have caught a glimpse of the "inward dimension" of a 3D life of faith,
-but having received the love and acceptance and forgiveness of God for their own souls,
-they now think they are "more worthy" than other people on earth,
-and are even arguing with each other about which of them is the "most worthy," and the "most deserving disciple" to be seated at Jesus' right hand in the kingdom.

And they have caught a glimpse of the "outward dimension" of a 3D faith life,
-but they think that it is only them, Jesus' "inner core" of 12 disciples, who are worthy to be doing missional ministry in the world.
-Only they can be casting out demons, or healing the sick.

-They are the specially chosen ones who are qualified to join Jesus in doing his saving work in the world.

You see, in so many ways, the early disciples were not really functioning very well in a 3D faith life.

- And when you read the gospels, the disciples don't really come off as good examples of what we are looking for.
- Peter has a big mouth, and is impulsive, and is just a bundle of contradictions.
- James and John are nicknamed the "sons of thunder" because they were hot-headed and needed an anger management class.
- Philip was skeptical and often negative, with very little vision about what Jesus was trying to do.
- Nathaniel was prejudiced and opinionated.
- Thomas was melancholy, mildly depressive, and pessimistic.
- Matthew was a former tax-collector, which meant he had worked in a hated profession that was inclined to cheat and abuse innocent people to line their own pockets.
- Simon the Zealot on the other hand was a former freedom fighter in Israel, what today we might call a terrorist, -working to overthrow the Roman government.
- Judas, well - you know how he turned out.

My point is, these early disciples of Jesus were no more attuned to living out a fully-formed faith in 3D than we are.

- All of us are by human nature and because of sin are 2 dimensional sorts of people.
- This 3D faith life doesn't come naturally to any of us.

It is something that God, by His Spirit, has to work into us.

- Our job, like that of the early disciples, is simply
 - to keep on walking with Jesus,
 - and pay attention to what He teaches us,
 - and seek to cooperate with the Spirit's work in us.

Like in this passage, when Jesus takes a little child and tells his disciples

- that if they want to be "great" in the Kingdom of God, they need to become like this child,

- for in the Kingdom of God the least is greatest, and the greatest is least.
- Those disciples were meant to pay attention
- and then begin to look at Jesus, and then at themselves, and then at others in a new kind of way.

And when Jesus said not to rebuke others for casting out demons and doing the work of God's kingdom,
-even if they weren't part of Jesus' inner core of disciples:
-The disciples were meant to pay attention,
-and then begin to look at Jesus' ministry, and at their own role in that ministry, and then at the role of others in that ministry in a new kind of way.

And when Jesus rebuked his disciples for wanting to call down fire from heaven on a Samaritan village:
-They were meant to pay attention to that rebuke;
-and wrestle with why Jesus would actually get mad at them for wanting to use the power of God for their own ends.
-They were to meant to begin looking at God, and at themselves and at the people of the world around them in a new way.

You see, they needed constant development of the upward, the inward, and the outward dimensions of their lives.
-It was an on-going process, and Jesus never gave up on them.

Well, that's a day in the life of the early disciples.
-What does this look like in our lives as 21st century disciples?

Let me give a few examples of what it looks like in my life when one of the three dimensions of my faith life is not functioning very well.

How about on those days when I dutifully have my Quiet Time.
-I read the Bible and I read the accompanying devotional entry, and I pray through my prayer list.
-But then I check off "devotional time" on my To Do list for the day,
-and you know what, if I thought about it I could say that I did all that and never actually spent time with God.

How crazy is that, right?

- The whole point of the Quiet Time is to cultivate my relationship with God,
 - and to develop the upward dimension of my life,
 - but I can go through all the right motions and not actually meet with God at all.
- It's because I am stuck in my 2 dimensional self.
 - I'm really wrapped up in my own inner dimension, and I am not really paying attention to God or anyone else.

But what if I try to over-compensate for my lack of an upward dimension by trying to act more spiritual every day.

- So I try to talk about God more, and quote the Bible, and pray with people, because after all, I am a pastor, right?
 - And I should act more "pastoral" and more "godly" with people.
- And so I also try to smile more so that everyone will know how joyful in Jesus I am.
- But what if I do all of that, while trying to cover up and avoid the pain of my inner life:
 - What if I am suppressing feelings of anger and resentment at someone who hurt my feelings,
 - and pretending it's not there.

You see, that is me trying to be all "upward," but not daring to look "inward."

- It is still being stuck in a 2 dimensional faith life, not living a 3D faith life.

Or what about when my faith life is relegated to few hours of being up front on Sunday mornings at church,

- and maybe a mid-week Bible study or small group,
- but there is no connection of what I preach and teach in church to my family life at home, or to my thought life, or the way I treat the cashier at the grocery store.

You see, the upward is meant to be flowing inward and then outward.

- But there are so many ways in which we can get all kinked up and the flow doesn't flow.
- We can get cut off from God and stuck on a human level.
- We can get cut off from ourselves, and stuck trying to

perform for God and the world when we don't really have
a living faith life in us.

- We can get cut off from other people, thinking a faith life is
all about me and God,
- and everybody else just gets in the way.

My friends, there have been times in my life when I was
working hard to study God's word, and trying hard to obey
all God's laws,

- and I was doing my very best to maintain my moral purity
and my doctrinal correctness,
- but through some painful encounters I discovered that I
really had no love for God or for other people.

In trying so hard to obey God's laws, I found I didn't really like
God, because I felt like He was judging me all the time.

- And in trying so hard to be morally pure and doctrinally
correct, I found I didn't really like other people,
- because I found that I was judging them all the time.

You see, I was trying hard to live a 3D life,

- but what I was really doing was trying to fit a 3D life into my
own more narrow 2D framework.

-I wanted to take this wide, expansive gift of eternal life that
God had given me, and make it fit into a tidy box

- that I could manage and control and keep safe.

But guess what? The life God gave me wouldn't stay in my
little box.

- That life has kept blowing the top of the box off,
- and escaping my grasp and control.

But when I stop trying so hard to contain and control this
eternal life God has given me,

- and when I simply trust Him more and more,
- and allow that life to both flow into me, and then flow out of
me,
- back to God in thanksgiving and praise,
- and out into the world in acts of love and compassion,
- the flow keeps flowing.

And then I start noticing the “flow of God’s love” all throughout my day.

-And it’s not dependent on me.

-It’s God doing His thing in and around me.

That’s what experiencing the 3D life is all about!

-Opening myself up in trust to what God is doing over me and in me and through me and around me.

-But it’s not me making it happen.

-It is me discovering God’s presence all through the day, transforming my 2D life into something far more multi-dimensional.

In our earlier reading from Galatians 5, Paul calls this “living by the Spirit.”

-And it is what he is praying for when he prays in Ephesians that God’s people everywhere will grasp how wide and long and high and deep the love of God is.”

-He doesn’t mean we will “grasp” it in the sense of containing it.

-He prays we will “grasp” God’s love in the sense of experiencing it as it flows in and through and around us by God’s Spirit.

My friends, we all of us have these tendencies towards living faith 2D, and not 3D.

-The early disciples were the same way.

So what did they do?

-They kept on walking with Jesus.

-They didn’t give up....and He didn’t give up on them.

And what Jesus ended up doing for them, and for us,

-is he died on a cross for all of our sin

-and he rose from the dead to give us an eternal, multi-dimensional life,

-and He sent forth His Holy Spirit to fill us with that life,

-and by the Spirit, the flow of the 3D life became a whole lot easier.

Peter and Andrew, James and John, Thomas and Philip and Nathaniel and all the rest except for Judas,

-they all went on to experience a living faith in all its dimensions in ways they had never imagined.

-And they were all used by God as channels of His expansive love into Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

God continues to transform lives like that even now.

-He invites us to follow His Son and listen to Him.

-He calls us to cooperate with His Spirit as He continually pours out His amazing love over us, into us, and all around us.

-And He encourages us to pay attention to all three dimensions of this life He calls us to live:

-our upward relationship with God,

-the inward development our own soul,

-and our outward ability to love well, both those who are near and dear to us,

-and even to love that wider world which can often seem so far apart from where we are.

Responding to God's great love by loving God back,

-loving others as ourselves,

-and making disciples who will do the same wherever we go.

That is the constant flow of a living faith in 3D.

Let's pray.