

“Only at Baskin Robbins”
Luke 2:52; Philippians 3:12-14; II Peter 3:17-18

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor
Smoke Rise Baptist Church
Stone Mountain, Georgia
August 18, 2002

It was a question that evoked a lot of discussion. About a month ago, I asked my Sunday School class what they knew about God, life and themselves that they did not know ten years ago. Listening to their answers was informative and interesting.

The question emerged from a study of Parker Palmer’s book, Let Your Life Speak. Palmer challenges his readers to be on a lifetime journey of self-discovery. According to Palmer, the self seeks wholeness, not the pursuit of things, ideals, a vocation or even standards. Each person is looking for the pieces that make up the puzzle of their life so he or she can put them together. When the pieces are discovered and put in their proper place, they give identity and direction.

To help my class continue this process of self-discovery, I asked them to reveal what they had learned about God, life and themselves over the last decade. I challenge you to do the same.

Why is it so important that we learn and grow? Thomas Scott answered that. “The only evidence of life is growth,” he wrote. How true.

Perhaps this was why Luke wrote that Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men. Maybe this was why Paul informed us he was not perfect but was striving to become more Christ-like everyday. Surely this was why the last words Peter wrote encouraged his readers to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He also knew growth was the only evidence of life.

How does a person learn and grow? There is a variety of ways. My best teacher has been life’s experiences, both others and mine. I’ve learned a lot from the consequences of decisions, good and bad. I’ve told many people that adversity is a great teacher and you don’t even have to be an A student to learn all the lessons.

What prevents growth? Again, there are many things but arrogance and indifference seem to top the list. Arrogant or indifferent people don’t seem to change much. They don’t have a lot of friends, either.

How would you answer the question today? What have you learned about God, life and yourself over the last ten years? I am not going to put you on the spot. Instead I’ll share with you from my own pilgrimage. I’ll tell you what I have learned and perhaps this can serve as a catalyst in your own process.

What do I know about God that I did not know ten years ago? I believe He is not as concerned with how we verbalize our beliefs as He is with how we live our faith.

Words are important and I know that. They can actually give definition and direction to our lives. So, I would never minimize their value, especially words that express our beliefs.

However, I don’t think words are as important to God as they seem to be to us. He’s not listening for the “right” words as much as He is looking for the “right” behavior. He is far more concerned with how we arrange our values and priorities, treat one another, handle our problems, temptations and challenges than He is how we verbalize our beliefs. The words God is interested in are composed of deeds more than letters.

I've never been impressed with a person who can recite the Apostles' Creed yet cheat, lie, steal, hold grudges, seek revenge and be cruel. I don't think God is either.

Some of the best people I know call God by another name or use religious words I am unfamiliar with. Does that make them heathens? Does it make me superior? Does God love me more than them? Hardly!

What do I know about life that I did not know ten years ago? It's not about me. Life is not about me, but about the Kingdom of God.

I have finally figured out that the only time life is about me is at Baskin Robbins. When I am picking out an ice cream flavor, it is all about me. The smaller the decision, the more it is about me. The bigger the decision, the less it is about me.

What is important is the eternal Kingdom of God and the role I play in advancing it. I am one actor on a big stage. I have a role to play everyday and the more I seek His will and do it, the happier I will be. When I try to make life about me, pleasing and satisfying me and my enormous ego, the more frustrated and nervous I will be. It's that simple. Why did it take so long to learn it?

Finally, what do I know about myself that I did not know ten years ago? I know that I can do far more than I ever thought. Most of my limitations have been self-imposed. Whenever fear and faith collided, I let fear win too many times. Perhaps this is because I have valued success over effort and been far too cautious.

I've discovered that a 'comfort zone' is a blessing and a curse. It is good to feel secure and safe but that security can lull a person into complacency. The longer you stay in your comfort zone, the bigger fear grows. Decisions become based upon what's safe, not right or best. That's sad.

I finally understand why God told Abraham in Genesis 12 to leave home and begin a journey with no destination in sight. He needed to move Abraham away from his comfort zone and teach him to rely upon God's ability not his own. This was a lesson he could never have learned in Ur of Chaldees.

Guess what? I wasn't learning it in Somerset where I pastored for almost seventeen years. Looking back, I see that most of my decisions, especially in the latter years, were not based upon faith in God but faith in Bob. I had to pack my bags and begin a new journey in an unknown land or pack my faith away. I am grateful everyday I chose the former.

Now, it is time for you to go home and answer these three questions. I wish you well as you do so. Feel free to share with me what you have learned.