

“Continue the Work of Jesus: Pass It Around”

Matthew 5:14-16

5/2/10

The kids gave you a gift this morning. They let their light shine and passed it on to you. This is what it's all about. Take your gift now and keep it with you this week. As you go about your life this week, use this as a reminder to pass it around—to let your light shine. Maybe even give this to someone else.

What can you do? What do you do to pass it around?

Mr. Schwartzbaugh was my 6th grade English teacher. When I went up to Jr. High School, I had no clue what to do with all the papers from classes or the locker they gave us to put them in. So I stuffed. My locker was like a big recycle bin. But no one taught me otherwise.

The first half of that school year I didn't do very well in Mr. Schwartzbaugh's class. Now, he was a good man but was pretty strict in class. He made you tow the line. He would call us up individually to talk to us about how we were doing, which made me about get sick when my turn came. I was ready to get hammered, ready to hear something like, “Pete, what in the world is wrong with you? Why don't you have your work done? Your grade is going to be bad and there's nothing I can do about it.” Maybe something like that.

So up to his desk I went, standing there with the sudden urge to use the bathroom. “Pete,” he said, “you're a good kid. I know you have had trouble keeping things in order. I know you can do better. And so I am going to help you out.” And he did. And I did better and felt better about myself. That was a turning point for me.

It's the stuff that maybe not too many other people, or maybe nobody else, may know about. But those are the things that breathe life into this life.

Who has made a positive difference in your life? Why? Yes, answer the question of how that person made a difference. But also ask yourself why. Why did s/he do that? Why would they do that?

We have reached the final week in taking a close look at our mission statement as Oakland Church of the Brethren:

Continue the Work of Jesus.

Love God.

Love People.

Celebrate Life.

Pass It Around!

Yes, after all we have now heard:

We are called to Pass It Around!

Ok, so what is “It”? What is this “It” we're passing around?

We are all passers.

All of us affect the world around us in some way. I mean, there's the obvious, like thousands of gallons of oil a day pouring into the Gulf of Mexico. That's passing something around.

We pass the plate at dinner, runners pass the baton, parents pass down genes, we pass around germs during flu season. Teachers pass on knowledge. I'm sure there are days I pass on my bad mood to the unfortunate ones around me. We passed the offering plate this morning.

You get the picture. We are all passers of something, whether good or bad. You and I have to decide what it is we are going to pass around. No excuses. No conditions. Everyday you have to ask yourself:

What do you pass around?

And it all comes down to this:

What, as followers of Jesus, are we called to pass around?

Jesus said, in Matthew 5:14-16, *“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”*

We have a room full of lit up lamps here this morning. Let your light shine.

What is the “light”?

Listen:

Acts 13:47: *“For this is what the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’”*

Ephesians 5:8: *“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.”*

Philippians 2:15: *“So that you may become...children of God...which you shine like stars in the universe.”*

Shine like stars in the universe. Light that travels farther and greater than beyond what you and I can comprehend. Light that brightens the darkness. Light that steers travelers in the right direction when they cannot see anything else. And not just any light, but the Light of Christ. The light that brings life to all people. The light that dispels all darkness. That light that saves.

The “It” we are called to pass around is the Light of Christ.

“It” is all the love and grace and goodness of God we have been given through Christ. New life. Given, not to keep to ourselves, but to pass to any and all around us.

So what does it mean to “pass” something?

Well, since we are going to be sitting around the tables here in a few minutes for lunch, allow me to use the dinner table image to help us understand passing.

I have shared before some of my childhood memories of Thanksgiving meals with all my extended family. We had quite a large gathering back then. Tons of food in lots of different serving dishes.

I’m sure it wasn’t true, but it always seemed like I picked the wrong place to sit at the table. You know, the spot that was at the end of the line for all the food bowls. Oh, I always got plenty of food. If there is one place in life I have always gotten more than my share—seriously—it is how much food I have. I look around the world and I know I have always had abundance.

So I always got my food at the table, but I would sit and watch the bowls get passed. I was hungry. It seemed it took forever to get to me. Did you ever have the person at the table that doesn’t pay attention to the passing? You know, someone would be fixing their plate, and sure enough all the food would get backed up at their station. No, you got to pass it around. It’s not meant to stay in one spot. There was always plenty, but it had to get moved around or it didn’t matter.

To pass “It” means I let go of “It”.

God has given us life, the Light of Christ, and it is not meant to get backed up in our lives, but passed around the table. We have the choice not to pass, but we have seen what that does. Inaction can cause serious hurt.

In Luke 12:13-21, Jesus tells the parable of the rich fool who built more barns to store all his abundance and keep it to himself so he could just relax and enjoy life. But then his life is taken that very night.

“And so all these things, whose will they be?” God asks.

You have to let go of “It” and pass “It” around.

But I know, something challenging for us comes along with passing it around.

To pass “It” means I give up control of “It”.

The rich fool wanted to control what he had. Gee, we don’t see any of that around us these days, do we? (I say with dripping sarcasm.)

Big business. Politics. Military might. Our right to oil. My lane on the highway. My land to do with what I want.

Dare I say, “My church.” “Our way.”

What about God’s love and grace? “You must accept it this way and live exactly like I live and believe and understand all this exactly like I do or else God will not accept you.” “He loves you, He loves you not.”

We know it’s true, that it happens like that sometimes. Sad, but true. We like to have control, or at least think we do.

Who has control when you pass “It”?

No one but God. And I know we are never going to be perfect at all this. But imagine the possibilities when we truly begin to let go and pass it around.

Because, what does “around” mean? Whom do your actions affect?

In Matthew 13:31-33, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to yeast and mustard seeds. Why? Because that’s how God works. It’s mustard seed ministry. As Tom Sine put it, “Mustard seed versus McWorld.” And I’ll take the mustard seed anytime.

Why? Because McWorld, the way of keeping things to myself to get bigger and more stuff—hoarding it—only destroys. And not just sucks the life from others, but sucks the life from yourself as well.

Mustard seed, yeast, passing it around, brings life and improves life for everyone. As Paul says it in 2 Corinthians 8:14: *“In order that there may be a fair balance.”*

The mustard seed grows so that birds may nest in its branches.

To “pass it around” means my life affects everyone around me.

Jesus said in Acts 1:8: *“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

That’s pretty much everyone.

How does “It” get passed around? There are awesome ministries that reach around the world, that feed the hungry, that rebuild lives, that teach and serve in so many ways—ways you can be a part of through the Church of the Brethren: Heifer Project, BVS, Disaster Relief, and so many more. You heard what we as Oakland are doing with Haiti, Community Unity in our backyard, our own witness fund for those in need.

And so we see, our world begins to shrink. Pass it around becomes a daily act.

Pass it around is a daily choice to love in whatever situation you find yourself, with whomever it may be.

Remember George Bailey from “It’s a Wonderful Life”? Young George has great dreams for his life.

"Mary, I know what I'm going to do tomorrow and the next day and the next year and the year after that. I'm going to leave this little town far behind, and I'm going to see the world. Italy, Greece, the Parthenon, the Coliseum. Then I'm coming back here, and I'll go to college and see what they know, and then I'm going to build things. I'm going to build air fields. I'm going to build skyscrapers a hundred stories high. I'm going to build bridges a mile long."

As it turns out, George is wrong. He doesn't know what he's going to do tomorrow and the next day and the next year and the year after that. As it turns out, what he is supposed to do tomorrow is pretty much what he did today. God's plan for him is to do the ordinary thing—which, of course, is the last thing that George wants to do. He wants to lasso the moon.

And that’s just it. We hear about all this this morning and maybe think what we have to do is big. Maybe you have big dreams for your life. And there is nothing wrong with that. Go ahead and dream big. God’s is even bigger and He just might lead you in that way.

But we cannot ever forget, like George Bailey forgot, that your and my place in this little corner of the world is critical to God’s work. The Dan West’s who start Heifer Project-like ministries that reach around the world are absolutely needed. But it starts right here in your back yard, with one cow.

No act of love is too small. Every good work is significant.

How did Jesus pass it around?

He healed even when it meant being labeled a rule-breaker. He loved even though it cost Him His reputation. He spent time and talked with folks, even though it embarrassed His disciples. He dined with people in their homes, even though He was called a glutton and drunkard. He washed feet, even though He was Lord of all Creation. He forgave, even though it cost Him His life.

Jesus didn’t force anyone to follow Him. He just loved whomever He was with. He’s not forcing any of us here to do anything. Do it because you want to. Do it because you have been given first. Amen.