

EASTSIDE COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2021

SERMON: "TAKE TIME TO BE HOLY"

TEXT: 1 Peter 1:13-20

William Dunn Longstaff, the son of a wealthy ship owner, was born in 1822 at Sunderland in Durham, England. He used his financial independence generously and was the patron of many churches and ministries of his day including support of William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army.

Dwight L. Moody, the famed evangelist was holding services in England and Scotland, when suddenly their benefactor died, leaving the evangelist and his team virtually penniless. Longstaff came to their rescue and funded the rest of the ministry.

One evening, Mr. Longstaff was attending a church service where the pastor was preaching on 1 Peter 1:16, "Be holy for I am holy." It impacted him on such a personal level that he immediately took pen and paper and wrote the poem, which would become the beloved hymn, "Take Time to Be Holy." Eventually the poem was published and a copy of it was given to George Stebbins who set the poem to music.

We are going to take time today to sing that hymn:

1. Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord;
Abide in Him always, and feed on His Word.
Make friends of God's children, help those who are weak,
Forgetting in nothing His blessing to seek.
2. Take time to be holy, the world rushes on;
Spend much time in secret, with Jesus alone.
By looking to Jesus, like Him thou shalt be;
Thy friends in thy conduct His likeness shall see.
3. Take time to be holy, let Him be thy Guide;
And run not before Him, whatever betide.

In joy or in sorrow, still follow the Lord,
And, looking to Jesus, still trust in His Word.

4. Take time to be holy, be calm in thy soul,
Each thought and each motive beneath His control.
Thus led by His Spirit to fountains of love,
Thou soon shalt be fitted for service above.

Today is the first Sunday of Lent, a time traditionally used to prepare ourselves to celebrate Christ's sacrifice on the cross that we observe on Good Friday. It is considered part of the "liturgical calendar" which is a list of special days and times that are relevant to the church. The liturgical calendar would include times like Advent, Epiphany, Annunciation Sunday, Pentecost, Good Friday, Christmas, Easter, and many events linked to events in the biblical story. Many churches that would consider themselves conservative protestant or evangelical, like many Baptist churches, have shied away from the liturgical calendar thinking it unbiblical or sadly trying to distance ourselves from anything that seemed too "Catholic." Many churches embraced holidays I term as the "Hallmark" holidays like Valentine's Day or Mother's Day and Father's Day which really have very little to do with the purpose of the church.

There are those who jumped on the "Lent" bandwagon but turned it into another "New Year's Day." How did they do this? By taking up the call to "give up" something for Lent. As I was doing my research for this sermon, I ran across conservative Christian articles that called for the Christian to give up "Lent for Lent." Lent traditionally was a time for fasting, but I would guess that many people have no real concept of why they are choosing to give up something. Often what is given up is a luxury item like chocolate, or movies, or coffee (some may be convinced that this is a real hardship, I might argue that it is withdrawal...) with the only concept that somehow we are getting closer to God! It eventually becomes a "resolution" that is broken because there is no real understanding of the "why" of giving something up during Lent.

Today we want to look at the “why” of Lent. The moment I re-read the lyrics to the hymn “Take Time to Be Holy” I knew that it summarized my thoughts. Let’s begin by reading the passage that inspired the lyrics...**1**

Peter 1:13-20:

¹³ So prepare your minds for action and exercise self-control. Put all your hope in the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world. ¹⁴ So you must live as God’s obedient children. Don’t slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires. You didn’t know any better then. ¹⁵ But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy. ¹⁶ For the Scriptures say, “You must be holy because I am holy.”

¹⁷ And remember that the heavenly Father to whom you pray has no favorites. He will judge or reward you according to what you do. So you must live in reverent fear of him during your time here as “temporary residents.” ¹⁸ For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And it was not paid with mere gold or silver, which lose their value. ¹⁹ It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. ²⁰ God chose him as your ransom long before the world began, but now in these last days he has been revealed for your sake.

TAKE TIME

“Take Time to Be Holy” – the title of the hymn gives you the perfect understanding of the motives of religious fasting or giving up something for Lent. Peter gives us our motive in verse 16, “**Be holy because I am holy!**” This pursuit of holiness, also known as “sanctification” should be the desire of our hearts. “Sanctification” is the theological term that reminds us that once we have had our sins forgiven, the salvation journey continues. Daily we desire to grow closer to Jesus and become more like him. We literally choose to “take time to be holy.” The act of fasting or giving up

something comes with the practice of taking the time you would normally use (i.e. eating a meal) and spending that time with the Lord. Now, unless you spend a huge amount of time eating candy...you would not have the "replacement" time to spend with Jesus. It truly is about sacrificing the one thing we have very little control over...our time!

PRACTICALITY

Do you want draw closer to Jesus? Do you desire to look at life, people, events, and even trials the way that Jesus would look at them? Then we need to become more like Jesus. Mr. Longstaff was a very practical man, and within his poem, he gave us some very practical ways to "take time to be holy."

God wants us to develop this closeness that gets us closer and closer to his mind and heart! That takes two-way communication. Paul tells us in Philippians 4:6-7:

⁶ Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. ⁷ Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

As we do this, we are expected to take scripture and allow it to nourish or feed us. So many people ignore the reading of scripture or they read so little that instead of getting their daily bread they eat a daily crouton. Paul reminds us that (2 Timothy 3:16-17):

¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. ¹⁷ God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.

Verse 2. We are reminded in verse 2 that as we get closer to God, people should notice! Are you different in a good way? Do you realize that one of the best ways to introduce someone to Jesus is by the example of your life?

We are encouraged to spend time privately with Jesus. This will change our hearts and our minds. Paul tells us in Galatians 2:20:

20 My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Verse 3. Do you ever feel like Jesus is just one of many aspects of your life. This can be detrimental to becoming holy. Verse 3 reminds us that it is necessary to “let Jesus be our guide” and not to “run before him” rather we are supposed to be disciples who follow.

We are called to put Jesus first before all things including family, work, and leisure. I have often run into people that have a hard time understanding how you can place your family second. It becomes an issue of idol worship and compromise. The moment we elevate anything, as good as it may be, above God, we have replaced him. The moment you take your eyes off of Jesus – all other aspects of your life will begin to suffer. The words of Jesus can sound severe in Matthew 10:34-38:

34 “Don’t imagine that I came to bring peace to the earth! I came not to bring peace, but a sword.

***35 ‘I have come to set a man against his father,
a daughter against her mother,
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.***

36 Your enemies will be right in your own household!’

37 “If you love your father or mother more than you love me, you are not worthy of being mine; or if you love your son or daughter more than me, you are not worthy of being mine. 38 If you refuse to take up your cross and follow me, you are not worthy of being mine.

The extreme example of this is the choice for an individual of another faith to choose to walk away from one belief in order to embrace Jesus. In

countries where it is illegal to change religions, believers have had to give up family ties, occupations, and even their lives to be a faithful follower.

Verse 4. Finally we see the ultimate, end-results of taking time to be holy. As we grow closer to the heart and mind of Christ, we will be prepared for “service above.” The active pursuit of holiness is what will allow the Holy Spirit to lead us as we look forward to seeing Jesus face to face. By abiding in Jesus, choosing to follow Him and be obedient to his will, we will add characteristics that will help us be holy. Jesus issued a warning for those who think mere actions, even very good actions, will secure them a place in Heaven. Jesus warned us in Matthew 7:21-23:

²¹ “Not everyone who calls out to me, ‘Lord! Lord!’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. ²² On judgment day many will say to me, ‘Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.’ ²³ But I will reply, ‘I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God’s laws.’

“Taking time to be holy” as God is holy, is about the heart! It is about obedience, about putting the time in that a relationship with Jesus deserves. It is about becoming a “new creation” – a creation that is changed in such a way that others will notice the difference. It is about choosing to know and identify with Jesus willingly in his death and resurrection.

This Lent season, as we come closer and closer to the cross, choose to give Jesus all the time that is His and take time to be Holy. This isn’t just for Lent, but for every moment of every day until we are reunited with our Lord.

Let’s pray...