

Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
November 16 & 17, 2013
John Crosby
REGENERATE: Living Upside Down
Philippians 2:10-15

I wanted to make this about generosity and not about money. We don't mind talking about money. We think Jesus does. It's important. We talk a lot about it with the new members but this is bigger than that. This is about generating a generous life, a generous spirit. I think that's why many of you are here. You are here because there is something that you would like more of. You want your life to have meaning and joy. You'd like more of whatever that is and you're hoping that coming here and associating with others who seek this invisible God will change the trajectory of your life.

We don't often get to think about where all this is leading, do we? Do you remember that phrase, "Nobody ever lies on their deathbed and says, 'Boy, I wish I would have spent more time at work'"? That's where this leads. In the same way, I think nobody ever says about their lives, "Boy, I want to grow up to be a prostitute. Can't wait." "I can't wait until I can defraud my entire company." "I hate the idea of retiring because my life and my work are totally insignificant. I have no meaning unless I am at work." Nobody ever says, "Gee, I really want to screw up the most important relationships in my life so that I can die alone." Nobody ever says these things but that's where we end up.

We want a different trajectory, a different direction in our lives. Most of us right now are not in the middle of disasters. We are in that middle ground where we are not sure which way the trajectory, the direction, of our lives is going and so we come here because through the ages when the people have come here, they have heard about a different kind of life. The apostle Paul did not talk about memorizing facts about Jesus. Instead he kept talking about a different way to live before God. If they would live a different, new kind of way, others would notice and it would take care of itself. He talks to a new group of Jesus followers in Greece and this is what he says in Philippians,

12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—

I've got to stop for a second. This is not a power thing for Paul. Paul is not a tyrant who says, "Obey me." For centuries Christianity was called The Way. Christians were called people of The Way because they started to live a different way in obedience to a different calling that had a very different route from the culture they were in. Paul is calling them to stay on The Way. "Just as you have always obeyed, stay on the Way." Paul says,

. . . continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, **13** for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. **14** Do everything without

grumbling or arguing, **15** so that you may become blameless and pure, "children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation." Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky

Paul tells them, "so shine like stars." And he ends,

16 as you hold firmly to the word of life.

Is that a different trajectory than you are on or do you feel like you shine like a star in a dark generation? Instead of giving a big lecture, I want to just ask you two questions and offer you two pictures that might give you a chance to assess where you are on this journey. The first one is back to that idea of living a life shining like stars, and my question is, "Does your life shine?" Not all the time but most days in different ways? Here's the picture from another translation of this passage in The Message. It says,

15 Go out into the world uncorrupted, a breath of fresh air in this squalid and polluted society. Provide people with a glimpse of good living and of the living God. Carry the light-giving Message

the message of Jesus, carry it out

into the night

How's that working for you? What's your wattage? What does your trajectory look like? That's the first question. The second is, "Well, I'd like to be brighter. I'd like to have light." How does that happen? How can I live in a new, generous way? What do you think of that phrase right in the middle of what Paul said? He said, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you." Does that make you feel better about it or does it make you feel worse? I think when people hear about living a new kind of life that way, working out their salvation, there are a couple of common responses that people have. For some, living a life that shines is totally God's job. You love Paul's Letter to the Romans, chapter 7.

18 I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.

For you, human effort doesn't matter because God's grace does it all. You object to any call for strenuous effort or costly discipleship by saying, "That is legalism. That is trying, rather than grace." I've got to tell you, I'm obsessed with grace. I want to be all about grace, and so I think it's important that we understand what it really means. That's some of you. I think that others of you have taken a different path to "work out your salvation." You read the "with fear and trembling" part and have a Marine Corps approach to the spiritual life. For you, spiritual growth is a product of commitment. Not Romans 7, you love Leviticus 11. Leviticus 11 says,

44 I am the LORD your God . . . be holy, because I am holy.

Okay, *holy*. Holy is the person who memorizes the most Bible verses, serves the most people, has the most regular quiet time, talks about God the most, prays the most. As long as Marine Christians are doing *things*, they must be growing spiritually even if love and joy don't seem to be produced. I think Paul is offering the complete package when he says, "Work out your

salvation,” Marines, “with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you,” Grace People. He doesn’t mean that you should live or work with a sense of anxiety. Am I trying hard enough? Am I good enough for God? I think when Paul says, “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling,” he means to be humbly dependent, realizing that God says we have a role to play but we do not control life.

It may be a newsflash to some of you that you do not control your life, but every one of you who has children knows exactly what I mean. We don’t control our salvation either. Some things we can control; other things we can do nothing about. But there is a third category that I think is like going to sleep. You can’t *make* yourself go to sleep. How many of you have tried to make yourself go to sleep and it hasn’t worked? Right! It doesn’t work. But you can prepare for sleep. You can go into a dark room. You can turn out the light. You can lie down on a soft mattress and usually sleep will come. You prepare.

I think faith is the difference between a motorboat and a sailboat. In a motorboat, you are in control. You are going fast. As long as you’ve got gas, you go. You set the pace. You are a Marine. But there is a different kind of boat, not a motorboat but a sailboat. In a sailboat you have things to do. You have to hoist the sails and steer with the rudder, but you are totally dependent on the wind. There is no room for believing that you are in control because if the wind doesn’t blow, you sit still but when the wind blows and you’ve set the sails, amazing things can happen. Our lives can go in unexpected ways. We can work with God in ways we never thought possible. It’s wet and windy and scary but it changes us. “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you.”

I said I didn’t want to turn this into a lecture and I’m not. Instead I want you to hear a story because I think you see that life change better in stories. One of my good friends here became a senior vice-president of CarVal Investors, the financial arm of Cargill, the largest multinational food company in the world. He had real success. He was a faithful member of this church and then some years ago, his life started to be blown in a different direction and he had to figure out what it would look like in the new season. He ended up as the head of Urban Ventures, from the largest multinational food company in the world to a small, Christian community development agency on the south side of Minneapolis. I want you to hear with me how he got there. Tim Clark.

[Crosby:] Tim, you’ve been a church guy for a long time, and I think you have heard all the different sermons. You had a long career. What started to stir in you? What started to make a change in your life?

[Clark:] John, we’ve been a part of this community for about 20 years, Tara and I and three kids, two in college, the girls, and now Brennan is a sophomore and helping out here with Commitment Class. Something started to stir in me, really, about ten years ago. It started, I would say, by being a deacon. I think I went through the typical deaconal experience that most do of really letting go and seeing how service weaves Scripture, prayer, and other things into that. Then, being an elder and going to Africa many times as CPC was transitioning from Uganda to Zambia and with many others being a part of that transfer. I could always sense in that missional work that there was something more.

At the same time, in my corporate world I was working harder, working faster, working longer, going to Africa on the back end of 10 to 15 days in Europe or Asia. There was a

great depression there in 2008 and 2009 and after we got our business reset, I could just tell on a plane back home that God maybe had a different calling for me, a different thing He was trying to teach me. I felt that being what I would call a sheep in wolves clothing, a Christian within a Wall Street-type world, was not exactly what His plan was for the gifts He had bestowed upon me. That sort of analogy stuck with me for quite a while, that I was very successful, that it was very profitable for our corporation, for our citizens, for our family, but it wasn't exactly congruent with my spiritual center. It put me a position then to kind of wonder.

As I came back (and I'm a type-A/all-in guy) there were not too many hours of sleep within my day. What it did, John, was put me in the position of really looking at things from the Matthew 25 parable of the sheep and the goats. At the end of the day, at Judgment Day, Jesus says, "You are either going to go to the right or the left. There is no in between." I realized I had put myself in the position of using my faith as what I'll call a Get Out of Jail Free Card. If I work harder and if I go longer, that will give me the opportunity to serve more, to give more. But really, who was controlling my faith? I found that I was controlling my faith. I was the motorboat as opposed to the sailboat. At that point in time, something just started to stir in me more and more that I needed to do something about.

[Crosby:] So you started to feel this conviction and as I recall, you clearly knew that not everybody is called to jump out of business. Most are not. But there was a sense that you were experiencing a call to something else. How did that happen?

[Clark:] Right. It was in 2010. I started to do something I had never done before which is to actually write things down. I was reading the Bible. I was trying to do things, but I had never had time to journal. I never had time to work through things that way. But in 2010 I was blessed that God hit me over the head with a two-by-four by putting different people, different Scripture passages, different sermons, different prayers in my life. I can tell you right now that it was getting out of bed to attend a Men's Breakfast because I felt obligated to hear a friend witness. That turned from just staying for the speaker, I almost walked out the door waiting to hear the speech but came back to hear the speaker. That speaker was very instrumental in providing the values for me to say, "Okay, I want to let go." And when God does that 18 to 20 times over a four- to five-month period, what I call hitting me over the head with a two-by-four, it's a little bit like Lee Hanssen said last week. It's not how much you give, it's how much you know. And for me, it was not, oh, my goodness, do I do something? It was, what happens if I don't?

[Crosby:] That stirring thing with God?

[Clark:] Yeah, Richard Stearns has been here. *The Hole in Our Gospel* is a great book. There's a quote up on the screen that at this same time was stirring in me.

Christ is an all-or-nothing proposition, and one way or another, every one of us has already made a choice about Him. We have either committed our lives to Him wholeheartedly, or we have not.

No in-between. Again as a Type-A/all-in person, it was just, really, the concept of saying you have to be all-in. You can't straddle the center. You can't use the Get Out of Jail Free

Card to try to tell God or the world that you are in control. What you have to do is give it up and say, "Okay, God, what do You have in store for me?" It was very difficult over 2010 to make that transition, but it was also easy because I knew at the end of the day that I was doing what God wanted me to do.

[Crosby:] So in an analogy, you are setting the sails for a different kind of voyage. I think this has got to have been such a huge change that it had ramifications for your family. "You're doing what?" How has the experience of all this affected your family?

[Clark:] I can't say that the transition was easy. It was a radical transition for Tara and me. It was moving from a position of relevant power and somewhat spectacularness into a small non-profit and it was something we had to get our hands around fiscally. It was something that we needed to be comfortable with, what the future of our lives might hold. It made the family-time dinner conversations much more groovy and much more enlightening. Nobody had wanted to hear about Wall Street and the world of finance and I certainly didn't want to talk about that at home so the concept of getting the family involved was new. Still only a year later, I had a lot to learn about the ability of our family to somewhat do this together, not just by them volunteering but by being a part of discussing, whether it would be on the way to school with Brennan or with the girls or with Tara. This was very complex and it needed different people and different sounding boards for me to do the job with three kids, two in college and one in high school, as they each plotted out their own paths. To be able to allow them to see what the rest of the real world looks like by bringing it home is something I'm very proud of. Hopefully we will be able to imprint some of that upon whatever God has for their lives.

[Crosby:] So, Tim, hearing "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you" has got to have been changing what you knew about yourself. What you know about yourself now that you didn't know then? How has your walk of faith changed?

[Clark:] I would say first, this is a don't-try-this-at-home disclaimer, like when you see these things on television. I would generally say, John, that my path is my path because of God's gifts to me, because of what He has planned for me. From a calling perspective, each of us, I believe, does have a calling. I do believe what Richard Stearns and Mark Batterson are saying when they say God equips the called, not the other way around, calling the equipped, because certainly I am not equipped in that fashion for what I'm doing today.

What it did in me was two things. One, it really gets back to the theme of this month, generosity. Whether it be the jellybean video, did everybody see the jellybean video? Did anybody else do the math and say that on an average of 79 years, which is how many jellybeans there were, that only 15 percent of those were spent in service to our family or our community? It made me ask some questions. Okay, am I striving and is that enough and should I do more? You've got Lee Hanssen talking last week about the question, not how much do you give but how much do you keep? You've got John Mitchell talking about the 1 percent. Really, I'd ask each of us to spend just 1 percent more of our time or resources for the Kingdom.

All those things are things that I continue to think about for myself, and I think this last month has grounded that. I'd also say, this has helped define my spiritual life in that daily I can now easily look at four things: my prayer life, my time spent in Scripture, my time spent in community. I've been a part of a men's small group here for over fifteen years and the accountability to those men as well as to coming every week in congregational worship is hugely important. And lastly, service. Every one of us is wired differently. The algorithm of every one's spiritual life is different but for me, the time in service, which really got ignited by being a deacon and the time in community, that accountability, helped me to focus, to ensure that I spent time on the issue. So these are some of the things I've learned.

[Crosby:] We are going to spend some time next month talking about and promoting Urban Ventures. It's one of those stars that shines like life and light in the dark places, but I wanted to ask Tim what it was like going from a multibillion-dollar corporation into essentially a local partnership of church, urban, and suburban. How does that work out in you?

[Clark:] I think a few things. When you look at the knowledge and complexities of the urban life, I think it's very clear that the world has grown apart even though south Minneapolis is only 2½ miles from here. The insularness and isolatedness in the world needs to be bridged today and that's part of my mission and my desire at Urban Ventures. Secondly, purely from a socio-economic perspective (take out the state component) hope is what I believe we can give and need to be supporting. We need to be looking for solutions because it's costing us every day. Thirdly, when you look at it geographically, the hood is moving. The hood has moved out of south Minneapolis. It has moved out of north Minneapolis. It's moved into Richfield. It's moved into Bloomington. It's moved into Hopkins, Brooklyn Park, Brooklyn Center. The concept of saying we can leave that alone because it's not here isn't necessarily true any more. Then lastly, I would say from a spiritual perspective, we all have much we can learn from each other and that is really something I've taken a hold of. I have as much to learn from my neighbors there as I do from my neighbors here.

[Crosby:] Lots more on that coming. We wouldn't be honest if we didn't say that we understand that there are some of you out there saying, "You don't understand what it's like for me. It's easy for Tim to change when he has a lot but I don't think we could do that." I wanted to ask Tim how he would respond. What do you think Jesus might be saying to us at CPC in this season?

[Clark:] Well, I go back to Richard Stearns talking about "You need to be all in." Okay, you go back and you talk about the gifts that are given us that we are clutching onto. It is when you let go of what you have that you move from the motorboat to the sailboat and really see what God has in store for you. That is what we have done. The video on generosity last week was very confirming for me, John, because it talked about generosity not as something we give but actually as something we receive from the Lord. The concept of giving is unnatural in that fashion. The video also talked about how each of us is participating in the human behavior of excuses and rationale not to give. Our path is our path. I was very impressed with Lee's honesty last week in talking about his tithing and his numbers. I'll match that and say from Tara's and my perspective, part of the reason we did this is that we have always been working from the concept that the

resources we have are the Lord's and the successes we have are to be the Lord's successes. Maybe we weren't always living congruently with that, however. The concept of moving into this action allowed us to budget, allowed us to be more focused on doing the right things with our finances and be able to say that we really are congruent in all aspects of our lives.

It's not like a CEO talking about his path from success to significance because daily as I have been working through struggling, I come back to the parables and the idea of being like Jesus. That's what I strive to do. Jesus didn't try to be spectacular. He didn't try to be significant. What He tried to do was be on the level of those He served and, really, be in a position where He was learning as much from them as He was teaching them. Henri Nouwen, I think, says it best in his Christian leadership book [*In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* by Henri J.M. Nouwen] when he describes the three temptations Jesus had. He says they were the temptation to be powerful, the temptation to be spectacular, and the temptation to be relevant.

As we all give, whether it be an hour a day, whether it be 1 percent more, whether it just be a Thanksgiving Harvest bag that we aren't giving under a concept of wanting to be significant but trying relate to the families. When we are praying for a family who is going to receive that bag, and some of those will go down to south Minneapolis and Urban Ventures, we are praying for the family not as serving them but that we can relate to them, that we can be at their level and they can be at ours, equal because we are that.

[Crosby:] Tim said he had discovered some of that spirit in his relationship with somebody named Layton. This seems like a neat way to wrap this up.

[Clark:] I really learned the ability to serve equally, shall we say, in my trips to Africa because they have so much hope in Africa yet they have so little. It has really made me ask the question, how does that work? What do they have that I can actually learn from? At Urban Ventures one of the opportunities and privileges I have is to interview all new employees and volunteers who come in and really set the vision and mission for them. A number of months ago, a gentleman by the name of Layton comes in. This is a gentleman who is 35 years old. He's been off of crack cocaine for about 12 years and dry for 12 years. He works full-time. He goes to school full-time and he mentors five current family members or friends, who either are or have been drug addicts, trying to get them through to see what life is like being clean.

So Layton comes in, and he's coming in for a volunteer position. I say, "Layton, I'm sorry. We're a non-profit. I don't have the money to pay you." He says, "No, Tim. That's not what I'm asking for. I know I work full-time. I know that I'm in school full-time. I'm helping out others but God has placed on my heart the concept that I need to come and serve because He has given me so much. He has put me on a path and I need to tell others what that path is." Here's a guy with virtually nothing who is working so hard and deciding to give another 15 to 20 hours of his time a week just to help out with not only our program for addictions but with our volunteers, coordinating or doing whatever. That blows me away. It puts me in the position of saying, what can I do to be in the position, really, time is that desire, of having the spiritual force and discipline to say, how do I learn from that? I think we all can learn.

[Crosby:] We're all on the journey. It takes a little courage to admit where we are. Thanks, Tim.

You are not called to be Tim Clark or Layton. We each have our own path but as you walk out of here, you want to have a different trajectory, a different ending. You want more light to shine. People who work out their salvation because God works in them go out into the darkness like Jesus did. Remember when Jesus says, "You are the salt of the earth." Well, I think a bunch of us are here, and this is the salt shaker, we stay in the salt shaker. You are the light of the world, but we are here in a lighted place and we need to go out into the darkness. Where does that start for you? Today where is God calling you to be light and life? This is the adventure of starting something new, maybe, maybe not, but serving others in some new way. Is it for you a fresh look at school and who around you needs God's blessing or at work, to see not just about a paycheck but about the people God puts in your path who need a kind word in the darkness? Is it for you today a recognition? Do you say you couldn't do what Tim did because you have too strong a grip on the things of the earth? Life comes to you when you give light and shine light on somebody else. Do you have anybody to talk with about this? Do you have anybody who can share your journey to whom you can say, "God help me. I want to be like that"? For the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven, I pray.

Lord Jesus, I thank You that Your Spirit worked in those fishermen so long ago, those early followers of Yours who changed course and went in a new direction, a direction that gave light and life. They didn't do it themselves. Your Spirit blew into their willing hearts. I pray that You will do that again this morning, that boys and girls and men and women and grandmas and grandpas will each say, "Lord, I want light and life inside by the end. Please be with me." I ask that You would give us eyes to see and ears to hear where You might call us to go and that we might be called to share. In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, we give thanks. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.