

New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario

Sunday, June 3, 2018

The Rev. Dr. David Thompson

Why do we sabotage ourselves?

Text: "God's wisdom is proved right by all who are her children."

A Zen master visiting New York City goes up to a hot dog vendor and says, "*Make me one with everything.*"

The hot dog vendor fixes a hot dog and hands it to the Zen master, who pays with a \$20 bill. The vendor puts the bill in the cash box and closes it.

"Excuse me, but where's my change?" asks the Zen master.

"O my brother," says the vendor, "*change comes from within.*"

Have you ever seen the Movie starring Kevin Costner called "Tin Cup"?

It's about a legendary golf pro who has a fatal flaw. He was someone who could easily win the American open except for one thing. At some point in the game he was likely to snap and go for a difficult shot, when wisdom would counsel caution. His friends all knew him well and would wait for "it" to happen.

So, he enters the American Open and qualifies. But every time he gets to a hole with a water trap in front, instead of using a safe lay-up shot, he goes for the green. In the last round he is confronted by the same hole and once again pulls out the distance wedge instead of the seven iron and sure enough into the water it goes!

At this point he could still win, but what does he do? He tries the shot again and again. Now he has lost the American Open and is starting to look like a real fool. Finally, 11 shots down, he has one last golf ball in his bag. If he loses this shot, he is disqualified. He winds up and hits a perfect shot over the water, onto the green and into the hole. So, ends the movie leaving the "it" problem unresolved.

Why is it that so many of us pull a "Tin Cup" in life? Just when we are winning hands down, suddenly we choke and it's the end of the ball game? The great T. E. Lawrence of Arabia fame, used to say that just when something he has really strived for was within his reach, when he could actually put out his hand and take it, he held back because he didn't want it any more.

Judy Garland said that she had done everything to excess. Her biographer wrote something about Judy Garland. "Below her yawned the snake pit: Ambulances to the hospital, stomach pumps, blackmail, throat slashed with broken glass, stage fright, shouting matches in public, pills by the handful, a bad drunk, promiscuous sex, sequestered salary, turned out into the street, bleak despair and paralyzing terror."

Did you know that about Judy Garland the famous star of stage and screen?

During the Clinton White House years, one day I happened to turn on the news. There was a particular Senator on attack against them. The White House staff were actually happy that he was attacking them. Why? They felt that it would only be a matter of time until this senator would say something that would undermine his credibility.

Fascinated, for two weeks I watched the news to see if this Senator would screw up. Sure enough right on cue, he opened his mouth and lost all credibility. His flaw had become predictable.

Is that you today? Do people know you so well that you have become predictable, in fact they predict that you will blow off steam and sure enough on cue that is precisely what you do?!

Why don't you get it? Why do you shoot yourself in the foot all the time? Why don't you learn from your past mistakes?

In case you think that St Paul was immune to this phenomenon let me quote him on his "Tin Cup"

Here it is: "I do not even acknowledge my own actions as mine, for what I do is not what I want to do, but what I detest. The good, which I want to do, I fail to do. I discover this principle then: That when I want to do the right, only the wrong is within my reach. Miserable creature that I am, who is there to rescue me?"

The great Blaise Pascal was an astute observer of human nature. Pascal thinks that we take risks because we are bored. That is why "Tin Cup" threw away the American Open. Life would be more exciting if he did the almost impossible. Pascal says that just so we can boast tomorrow to our friends that we played better than someone else. That is the same reason scholars sweat to solve hitherto unsolvable problems in Algebra. That is why we risk incredible danger. Some people observe this quality in themselves not to become wiser, but just to show that they know about it, and according to Pascal these folks are the biggest fools of the lot because **they know what they are doing when they are doing it and do it anyway**, while another person if they knew about it would stop.

Do you know anybody who is aware of their behavior pattern, who spectates themselves while they do it again? I do! And I wonder just what kind of inner chaos there must be in these person's minds. Often they are brilliant, often they are aware of their tragic flaw, but they hold onto that flaw against all comers. They are unreachable. What is going on here?

In our society today, some of us make ourselves incredibly busy so that we don't have time to think. We divert ourselves with our fatal flaw.

"Tin Cup" diverted himself by playing golf. His fatal flaw lay at the center of his diversion. To get the shot on the green was the stuff of legend and that stuff of legend was his "it" that resulted in his blowing it. A lay-up shot was too safe, definitely not the stuff of legend. Why if only he could whack the ball onto the green with a wedge, why nobody else could do that. So, the 11 shots come, and the legend eludes him. So, does the stardom, so he is never satisfied. He knows he could do it. "I can make that shot" he says.

I know a woman who works all the time. She is honest. She tells me that she doesn't want to have time to think.

When she does she gets miserable and afraid. So workaholism is her chosen flaw.

Have you ever asked yourself why is the chase more important than the prize? What do you do with the prize after you have got it? We are suddenly back to ourselves. It is easier to deal with a tragic death, a lost job, a failed marriage or a cancer diagnosis and begin those journeys than to pause and reflect on our lives.

The danger keeps us going. We subscribe to the notion that "It's not the destination, it's the journey. We don't really want to arrive and then have to confront our own self again!

What is the root of all this kind of thinking and behavior? Why do we work all the time? Why was Judy Garland so externally successful but her private life such a failure?

I want to ask you a question today. Is God external to you, out there, big enough to create the universe and definitely only outside of you?

Well what does The Christian faith say? It agrees that God is external to us. But there is also a parallel truth.

Helen Keller, both blind and deaf, was not cut off from God. She became aware of God within her. She said, 'I believe that God is in me as the sun is in the color and fragrance of a flower- the Light in my darkness, the voice in my Silence.'

Albert Schweitzer once said, "The nature of the Being outside of me, I can understand only through the Living Being which is within me."

The Bible says, 'The Kingdom of God is within you.' It teaches us that the Holy Spirit may be invited to live within us. The greatest verse for this is "I stand at the door of your heart and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door of their heart to me, I will come in and dwell with them."

What is "Tin Cup's" problem?

He does not have WISDOM! Something comes over him and his good judgement is suddenly lost. He does not pause and go inward to where God is within him. Only afterwards does he ask, 'Why did I do that?' Too late!

Let me hazard a guess this morning. If you are "Tin Cupping" your life the chances are better than excellent that you are not taking the time to go inward, to where God is.

Jesus took the time to do this often. He withdrew to meditate, to be alone with God, to pray and to reflect. He went inward to find God and get the guidance he needed.

I often say that we can all claim the promise to be Divinely guided and Protected. How do we do this? We go inward to God and ask for help.

Jesus experienced the “Tin Cup” temptations: for power and influence, recognition, fame and the stuff of legend in his famous bout with the Dark One in the desert, but he did not give in. In the desert he experienced the text: “Be still and know that I am God.” He listened to the still small voice of wisdom within and cultivated his hearing of it. Do you give yourself time to listen to the still small voice of God within? It takes discipline, setting aside a time for this. Some people do it by their bedside, for others it is in the shower or the pool or on a walk early in the morning when they are “open” to God.

If we don’t do this, we will have to learn the hard way.

May people I know are dying inside. They don’t care for themselves physically, psychologically, emotionally or spiritually. They don’t love themselves at all. In fact, their lives are full of stress. They have no peace. They know that they are “Tin Cupping” their lives. They are like plants in a workplace- without sunlight, stuck in a pot without water in an airless office. Is that you today?

Beverly Sills, the famous Opera star described one such plant. In New York she had no time for anything. Someone gave her a plant. It was placed on a stand in her office. Within a week it had died. That bothered Beverly.

But one of its leaves was still green. So, she clipped it off and planted it. She watered it every day and left it under a lamp at night. She made sure that everyone knew that the lamp had to stay on at night.

People thought she had lost it! But pretty soon others noticed that it needed water and watered it. People started to cheer that little leaf on to live! One morning another little leaf had come up through the soil. A couple of days later another appeared. And eventually that first leaf had become a whole and healthy plant again.

If your real self today is down to one leaf, then you need to pay attention to your inner life. You won’t grow unless you do! It is vital that you set aside time to be alone and find the Great One who made all things, within you!

Take quiet moments to ask for wisdom, for guidance from the still small voice within. Then one day as you do this there will be a shoot, then another shoot, then a branch until you are a healthy plant again or perhaps for the very first time in a very long while.

How will you know that you are a child of God’s wisdom?

By your results! What Beverly Sills did with her plant, you can do with your life! The results will be there for all to see. You will be peaceful, gracious, full of unrepentant optimism! And others will see and begin to cheer you on.

Then you will understand this text with which we began:

“God’s wisdom is proved right by all who are her children!”

Are you a child of God’s wisdom? You can be!