

Of Ripples And Pot-Holes

A Sermon by Pr. David Johnson

Early one morning, as I gazed out the front window of our family cabin, I saw a fishing boat speed across the lake from East to West. Not a particularly odd scene, considering our lake is one of the most popular walleye and bass fishing spots in the area. But you see, just prior to that moment, I was standing in awe at the view, amazed at the absolute calm of the lake surface. It was, as they say, like glass; until the moment that boat sped by.

But suddenly my disappointment was transformed to intrigue. I wondered, "How far could the ripples of that single boat's wake travel across a perfectly calm lake?" I stood there for several minutes, simply watching as the wake traveled North and South from mid-lake. One boat, one action, had literally sent out waves and ripples that impacted the entire lake (though simply). How far, I thought, do my actions carry across the surface of life?

I thought about this as I prepared to conduct the wedding of my younger brother, Stephen, and his wife-to-be, Julie. Neither of them would stand before me as a calm lake on that coming Saturday evening. Both of them had faced many choppy experiences. Individually, they had experienced storms of various kinds, the cold winds of relational pain, and even the icy-bitter tempest of death. You might say, they could both do with a bit of calm seas.

The Scripture passages they chose suggested this:

Jeremiah 29:11-13 For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. ¹² Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.

Colossians 3:12-14 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; ¹³ bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. ¹⁴ Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

Now these are wonderful stand-alone passages, and we love to hear God's heart of promise and compassion showing boldly in both. But what many people don't know or remember is that both passages are taken from a context of correction or difficulty. The calm waters of promise often come in the wake of pretty choppy seas.

Jeremiah shares his assuring promise of God after just prophesying the death of a lying false prophet who was telling the people that the exile wouldn't last. They were being punished for a reason. They had disobeyed the Lord and acted belligerently. Their disobedient behavior had sent a huge wake across the lake, impacting both themselves and their neighbors. But God mercifully spoke the calm of this promise into the midst of their punishment.

The beautiful verses from Colossians follow immediately on the heels of Paul's corrective words to his readers. What many forget is that he has just reminding them

that if they have truly died with Christ, then they are also to be dead to their sinful fleshly responses. They are to stop making waves that negatively impact those around them. And Paul includes such stormy behaviors as: "*Immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed ... anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech.*"

Which leads me to my second experience, pot-holes. Where the wake left by a passing boat disappears relatively soon (*as do some less-significant behaviors*), the pot-holes left on a road (*by frequent or more painful behaviors*) are more permanent and potentially quite jarring. In fact, a bad pot-hole can damage your car and be physically jarring, as we found out as we visited the ARC for our Pastor's Conference.

The weekend before the conference we spent a weekend with our kids and grandkids at one house on the property, the Mary / Martha house. To get there, you have to use one of two driveways. It was bumpy and in need of some new surfacing.

So when the conference began, I decided to use the other driveway, which ended up to be even worse than the first. It had some significant holes scattered across the face of the road, and it took some creative driving to navigate the road without harming the van or Vicki. You really had to be proactive in choosing the right course to drive or you'd have quite a painful trip to the meeting.

So what is my point? Well, it's actually quite simple. The blessings and godly attitudes we seek to experience in life (*like those we read about in Jeremiah 29 and Col. 3*), are not like the vast unending lakes of glass, or the miles of smooth super highway we've come to expect today. But rather, they are the moments of calm, interrupting the choppy waters of reality. They are the high points on the road, scattered amongst the potholes of trial and sin that often clutter our journey through this life.

To maintain a calm life, you sometimes have to navigate slowly, keeping your wake small on the lake. You have to consciously dodge the bumps, the breaks, and the potholes of Satan's deceptions and your natural fleshly impulses. As Paul writes in Colossians, "You must be dead to these things."

Instead, you want to keep your behaviors God's honoring, bringing blessing to those around you. You have to keep your eyes on the character and Word of God, holding fast to His Holy Spirit and His transforming grace. That's the point of Paul's ongoing challenge as he continues his thought in Colossians 3:

Col. 3:15-17 "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. **16** Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. **17** Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."