

Deep: Transformation
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Once upon a time, before Rita and I were married, we spent a Thanksgiving at my parents' house. We had been engaged for a couple of months, and were very much in that "in love" stage of our life together. As part of our Thanksgiving snacks we always made celery stuffed with cream cheese and olives, or peanut butter. My mom asked us to take celery duty for the day together, so we set to work stuffing celery.

The problem was that we had different ideas about what the finished product should look like, and to some degree, different visions about how the process should work. I am a bit of a food perfectionist, so I wanted to make sure that the cream cheese was perfectly stuffed inside each piece of celery so that when you picked up the celery you didn't get cream cheese all over your fingers. Rita, on the other hand, is not a celery-stuffing perfectionist. She just wanted to get the project done so that she could move on to help out in another area.

So she would stuff her celery with cream cheese and put it on the plate with cream cheese hanging out all over the place. And I would pick up her piece of celery and fix it, wiping off the excess cream cheese and getting it just right. All was peaceful until she figured out what I was doing. This didn't go over very well at all. She couldn't believe that I was being so picky about something as silly as celery, and I couldn't believe that she was NOT being more picky about something that important!

Over the years together we have learned that there are some details that are important to each other, and some that are not. Both of us have learned (most of the time) to laugh these off and appreciate the differences between us, but every once in a while we still argue over something that you would probably think is a little strange. But the fact that each of us pays attention to different details probably works out in our favor in the long run. Attention to detail – whether it's in food preparation or cleaning the house – usually pays off in the quality of work done in the end.

We know this is true because in general we place a higher value on things that are done with attention to details. We might choose a car, a computer, a cell phone, or even a restaurant because the details make a difference. We notice small, almost imperceptible things about these places or products that somehow seem important to us, and then we make value judgments based on those details – for better or worse. When the details are attended to we are impressed, when they are neglected we look elsewhere.

But while we evaluate things like our cars and our restaurants this way, we are less likely to evaluate ourselves by the details. Maybe particularly from a spiritual point of view we don't want to look too closely at ourselves, choosing instead to take a 30,000 foot view. But the details of our spiritual lives actually do matter to God. And the more we pursue relationship with God, the more attentive he wants us to become to the details of how we follow him. That can be initially uncomfortable, but productive in the long run if we allow the tension to lead us towards growth in the quality of the relationship we build with God.

Last week Jason helped us think about the call for us to put off an old way of living and replace it with a new way of life in Christ. Next week we will look at some very specific

relationships where the new life in Christ is meant to be lived out. This morning's passage is an important bridge between the two.

Let's read from ***Ephesians 5:3-20***. In verses 3-7 Paul points back to their past experience in order to set up the present and future. Among those who are God's people, there shouldn't even be the slightest hint of the things he mentions here. They should move away from certain things because they put off an old way of life and instead put on a new way of life in Christ.

So sexual immorality, impurity and greed are all supposed to be left behind. Along with those, coarse and foolish talk that doesn't build anyone else up in Christ becomes a thing of the past as well. As a follower of Jesus this movement from an old way of life is not really a matter of submitting ourselves to a certain set of rules. Rather, as our lives become more involved with Christ and our character is shaped according to his purpose, certain things are rooted out because they are inconsistent with Christ's intent for us.

If we go back to those ways of thinking, talking, and acting, then we are actually moving ourselves back under God's wrath on our lives. As we recall from the beginning of chapter 2, that's not a place that any one of us really wants to find ourselves. So as we move away from that lifestyle, we move towards a life that is obedient, and so experiences God's blessing. It is a clear call for us to understand that following Jesus brings about a real change in the direction of our lives. Verse 11 says that the old way is filled with fruitless deeds of darkness, leading to shame.

We don't want to go back to those, reveling in them all over again, because they don't align with the nature of the God who has called us out of that life and into the light of his Kingdom. So we are not to even partner with those kinds of works, but to expose them. It's a phrase that sounds confrontational, but in the context of the passage really seems to mean that we simply shine the bright light of truth and life into the darkness. As we shine that light (filled with grace and truth) into the dark places of the world, we bring Jesus' call to come out of that darkness to bear on those places. The purpose of the light is not to show how dark the darkness is, but rather to call someone into the light. Verse 14 says that it's about allowing Christ's light to shine in the heart of a person who is dead in their sins, bringing them to life instead.

Instead of living in the darkness, we are called to live in the light (verse 8) and while living there find out what it means to please the Lord with our lives. I think the life that pleases the Lord is described in the brief parenthetical statement of verse 9: a life of goodness, righteousness and truth. These three words become the standard measure of our lives. Are my words, actions, and even thoughts good, righteous and true?

When we experience Christ's light and life the result is the alignment of our lives with these three words, pleasing God in the process because they reflect God's character and light illuminated through our lives. Goodness, righteousness, and truth are perfect descriptors of God's nature, and are things that we would struggle to produce on our own accord. Maybe we could do so in small doses, but eventually our resolve wavers. But in Christ the fruit of our life is being totally transformed.

So we need to pay careful attention to how we lead our lives, even down to the details. Wisdom thinks about the details, refusing to take them for granted. The joke you tell at

work, the gossip you share about your friend, the offhanded comment about your wife or your boss to your coworkers – these are all details that matter. Foolishness ignores the details, believing they're too trivial. Paul outlines the foolish lifestyle which leads to drunkenness, which leads to wasteful living – the broader category and the one that we should pay attention to. It's the same word used to describe the prodigal son's lifestyle when he left his father's house – wasteful living doesn't take any regard for Christ's desire to shape our lives, and leads us further into darkness and foolishness.

But when we are careful to the details, we prove ourselves wise because we live out Christ's wisdom and power in our own character, and show an understanding of God's will that is more than just theory, but is practiced. The details we pay attention to reveal something about our values. When we attend to the spiritual details we show that we value God's priorities. He describes it as the kind of life where we make the most of every opportunity, knowing that we don't get unlimited opportunities to bring goodness, righteousness and truth to bear on our world. It's a dark, confused place looking for light, and so we can't afford to blend into the background.

In this passage wisdom, and the power to live this way, is equated with the filling of the Holy Spirit. His presence in our lives leads us to live in such a way that we are able to speak that life and light to each other every time we gather together – whether in this place or outside of it. So we sing, praise, pray and generally encourage each other to participate more fully and deeply in Christ's life together. That's what make the church such an important place, and what makes each of you so significant for what we do each week, but each day as well.

When we each come to this time filled with Christ's light and life by his Holy Spirit then we are free to bring thanksgiving out of the overflow of our lives. When we pay attention even to the details of our daily relationship with Christ, the Spirit fills us more and more, allowing his presence to flow more freely inside and outside the church. Being filled with the Spirit is about more than just what happens in here on Sunday – it is all about always giving thanks to God through Christ.

So for us to be all that God wants us to be, we need you to pay attention to the details of your life. We need you to understand that how you live will overflow into how we live. When you live in light and life, you bring that into the life of the community here, and we need that in order to show Christ in all of his glory and grace. I confess that I love when the band gets quiet and we can hear your voices lifted to Jesus in worship. It is exactly how we are supposed to encourage each other to pay attention to the details of our lives. When I feel that, it makes me want to follow Jesus more carefully, and more fully!

And if you don't feel like your inside that circle yet, then I want to make sure you know that there is a way in that is fairly straightforward. The most important detail to get straight is your commitment to Christ, which opens the door for the filling of God's Spirit in your life, which enables you to contribute to the encouragement of the community here in the fullest way possible. When you choose to walk away from darkness and allow Christ's light and life to shine within you he calls you to join us in his presence, and he adds your voice to the mix not just of the singing and the music, but the worship of the King that comes up from this place.