

Full of what?

Good morning,

Part of this sermon was written using voice dictation while I was driving. When rereading it, I discovered that when Jesus was asked "what must I do to inherit eternal life", Jesus' response was "Use your turn signal!"

So, there I was, staring at a luggage sorter. No, I wasn't checking a bag for a flight (which I try to avoid doing at all costs) and I wasn't behind the scenes at an airport. I was in an exhibit hall at a convention centre, in the middle of the Skills Canada competition, where my son was also competing, and I had wandered to another area in the convention centre. I was looking at one competition area for six post-secondary competitors from across Canada, the top in each of their provinces, in the industrial controls category. The area had a series of wooden stalls, each with a grey metal box hanging on one of the walls, with three lights at the top. The metal boxes look like those electrical boxes on the walls of large buildings. The difference here was that the boxes were more or less empty except for three coloured lights on the top on the outside - green, yellow and red. In a span of only twelve hours over two days, the competitors were going to build the needed components such as industrial controllers, power cabling (safely!) and circuit boards that would control a luggage sorter, such that it could sort a large, medium or small bag, and fit all that wiring, cabling and equipment in that grey metal box. There was no conveyor belt, nor bags. The judges would simply run a program that simulated bags, and the sorter would have to read them properly. It was while I was looking at this, that it dawned on me that I have never really thought about what it takes to make something like a luggage sorter, or what's in a building, or how electrical power is harnessed to make things work. In my office building, I simply take for granted the sprinkler systems, the power cabling, the walls and what supports them, the

plumbing, the lighting, the windows, etc., and that they will all do their jobs when needed. I'd certainly never thought about the skilled person or the equipment needed to make a luggage sorter, that sits in airports all over the world. And there I was at a competition watching all manner of skilled folks making and doing things that I take for granted.

So, thinking that we may not often think about what equipment fills a building, or fills that space under the hood of our cars, I suspect most of us also don't often pay attention to what fills us. What are the qualities that we have and need to make life work? Do we take the time to consider what fills us as Christians? We do need to occasionally look inside ourselves to ensure we have what it takes to have a faith that is visibly different, perhaps even counter-cultural. And we need to be careful about what feeds us, what others feed us, what we feed ourselves. We need to take care of our inner engines. Watch out for the pollution that can so easily set in.

It is this kind of self-examination that Jesus is talking about in the 11th chapter of Luke. In fact, the whole chapter almost reads like a network television self-help/expose show, with Jesus as the star host, and, wow, he is BU-SY.... At the opening, Jesus teaches the disciples to pray what we now call the Lord's prayer, following which he talks about giving people what they need... ..and God's giving being even more generous, then he casts out a demon, criticizes his critics, tells a crowd that their generation is evil, tells people how to fill themselves with light (more about that in a moment), has dinner with a Pharisee, but before they've even saw down to eat, he criticizes him

And finally, the chapter ends by Jesus taking a swipe at lawyers.

Call this the JoN Network, or The Jesus of Nazareth Network, and the reality show called "JC takes the on the world". However, throughout all the criticism, Jesus is actually pointing out what God is expecting from God's created people, and how God wants to interact with them, and how God wants us to interact with each other. It's not about outward appearances, it's about who you are - what fills you.

The passage that was read earlier discusses the eye being the lamp of the body. "If your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light, but if it is not healthy, your body is full of darkness." Think about that image for a moment. The eye as a lamp. If we can see clearly, and use it to look for the good, we can fill ourselves with the light God wants each of us to have, such that we act in good faith. How we decide to look at things actually provides either light or darkness in our body. The filters we use to see things determine how much our eye will be the lamp we need.

However, our eyes can't see everything at once. We need to work incrementally to build the skills and equipment we need to act. Each little interaction in our lives can lead to light entering us, or not. Developing the skills to continue leading a Christian life is not a one-time exercise; it's a life-long endeavour. And it starts with simple, small things. Small changes. Maybe it's carefully choosing one's words in a conversation; maybe it's not choosing to do something that could hurt someone; maybe it's praying more regularly, or simply taking a short walk outside to refresh and appreciate that God's creation is just a little bigger than ourselves. Or maybe it's just taking the time to listen to someone for a moment. It starts with little things, little choices that hone our skills in Christian living. Every time we make a simply good choice, every time we carefully

respond to what we've heard when we've been listening to someone else, we are putting a little light in ourselves, a little something good. We're using our skills to build. Throughout our lives, we are constantly having to filter that which is building good, and that which destroys it. Sometimes, this comes naturally with the gifts we've been given, other times it takes an active effort to use our skills and ingenuity for good, to train ourselves to be consistent Christians. If what we are seeing is a life of love, God's love, then you don't do it all at once. It's not like cramming for an exam. You don't cram for a life of love. And it's not about what you're doing, or making a show of doing that matters. It's what inside that counts.

In fact, immediately after Jesus discusses your body being full of light, the dinner with the Pharisee occurs:

While he was speaking, a Pharisee invited him to dine with him; so he went in and took his place at the table. The Pharisee was amazed to see that he did not first wash before dinner. Then the Lord said to him, 'Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You fools! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? So give for alms those things that are within; and see, everything will be clean for you.

'But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and herbs of all kinds, and neglect justice and the love of God; it is these you ought to have practised, without neglecting the others.

"The one who made the outside also made the inside?" As the editors of my Bible suggest, "Jesus turns back the Pharisees' criticism that the outside is unwashed by insisting that the inner life is of equal importance to the outer."

Indeed - pay attention to what's inside you. Jesus' discussion of light filling the body is immediately followed by him making an example of what is not light filled.

So where do you start? Well, it's not our own efforts that make a difference. In fact, quite often it isn't. Interaction with God is a two way street. Repeatedly in Lukes Eleventh Chapter, Jesus points out that God is generous, and will give us what we need if we ask. For example, vs. 9 through 13.

'So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!'

Notice the comment on human behaviour. Jesus describes us as knowing what is good intuitively. If your child asks for an egg, you don't give a scorpion. Clearly, if we know not to do that, then surely God who created us knows what to give us! As the late David "Doc" Schroeder once said, "we have been created as God's free moral agents, with the ability to choose between right and wrong." That's the gift of God creating us in God's image. God, who created our life, will continue to give us what we need if we earnestly seek it. If we try make the effort to listen, if we use our eyes to look for God, God will give us the light we need.

This is not an outward action - it's not something you have to put on a "To Do"

This is not an outward action - it's not something you have to put on a "To Do" list. It's an act of prayer. Our requests of God are prayers, and in those moments of quiet prayer and reflection, our spirit is being renewed, and requests heard. Think again about the Lord's prayer we recited from memory earlier, the prayer that opens this chapter about looking at the inside.

After naming God as the holy one, the first line is "Your kingdom come" or, as other ancient versions of this text read, "Your Holy Spirit come upon us and cleanse us."

Then we say, give us our daily bread, or, our bread for tomorrow." Give us what we need to nourish our inner selves. And then forgive our sins.

We're 20-30 words in, and not one request for outward action yet. This prayer is asking God to fill us inside first, and then, the first action ask to do? "...as we forgive others who have trespassed against us." Now, I'm not going to go into depth about forgiveness - that's whole other sermon or series of them, but I will say this - it takes a change on the inside of us to be able to forgive someone else. A change inside of us that can only be facilitated when we can recognize we too have sinned and been forgiven. We're building those synaptic pathways that will allow us to recognize God and allow God's Holy spirit to flow into us like water, just like the water that helped fill the jar earlier.

And rest!! So often, we think we have to do that next thing to get what we need, when often it's really rest and relaxation that we need. Just as we need sleep each day in order to be functional, our minds and spirits need rest so we can simply allow things to percolate, to allow things to germinate inside. That's as much a calling of God, as it is to use our gifts for others. I remember something I heard once in a sermon here a very long time ago: After the first commandment to love the Lord your God with all you heart and mind, the second commandment is to love your neighbour as yourself. But, and this is the

clinger, you can't love your neighbour if you don't love yourself first. To

recognize the light in others, you need to first be full of light yourself.

So, recognizing our own desire for light, and if we do practice living into the light, or "loving" into the light, then providing others with light, and helping others find the light themselves is what loving your neighbour means. All of us need each other to find the light, to help each other. We need to be the lamp on the lamp stand that shines for all, so that we can fill each other's eyes with light. Having nurtured God's light in ourselves, then we can share this light, and receive light from others. Then our eyes will be full of light, and God's love will be truly be realized.

Amen.