

“One Small Year” December 27, 2009

Message Pt. 1:

Good morning and welcome the day after the day after Christmas...the last Sunday of 2009. Can you believe it? Would it be okay if we all just gave one big *whew*? Yes, let's do it together...on three 1,2,3...*whew*! Can I just play back my week for you? Not that you have a choice...

Last Sunday afternoon...a week ago, we had the St. Luke's staff holiday gathering—Monday a friend hosted dinner to introduce us to her friend from South Africa—Tuesday we had The Garden Worship Team holiday gathering—Wednesday an open house—Thursday was of course Christmas Eve—Friday was Christmas—yesterday was Jenny's grandfather's birthday, and today, well today...is today. Did I mention...*whew*!

I don't know about you, but it hasn't been like this for just this past week—the whole month of December has been crammed. Then though, in reflecting on the song *One Small Year*, it occurs to me that it seems the whole year has been kind of like this—does anyone else feel that way? Look at the first verse again...

One small year
It's been an eternity
It's taken all of me to get here
Through this one small year

As several of us talked about this song at worship team, we decided it kind of captured the sentiment of this last year, period...how many people are feeling. What I mean by that is when we listened to the song, it seems like it speaks to many of the life themes we talked about this past year here at The Garden. In the big picture, or as I am fond of saying...the 30,000 foot view...a year isn't really a long time, but while we are living in the midst of a particular year...one small year can be like an eternity. And this past year with the dark cloud the economy has cast over so many, it really does seem like an eternity. And more than just the economy this year...we have endured many significant losses...it all just kind of piles up sometimes.

I began to wonder if what we talked about this year at The Garden reflected what was happening in our lives. I know you may be saying, duh Stan...ya think? But seriously, I went back through our video archive for our messages and identified the ones people have looked at the most, and looked at the themes...what is it that we talked about, and why did it seem to resonate. The service from this past year that got the most hits on our website was *Sprints & Marathons* October 11th and it seems like that is exactly what we are talking about now. Listen to these key points from that service.

- Life is full of challenges that require patience, pacing and perspective
- Each experience in our lives is an opportunity to learn and grow
- We are not in this race alone...God is always at our side, giving us guidance, strength and courage that we need to complete our marathon of life.

As I read back through this message, I think I understand why it resonated so much...for me personally I think it's that first point...*patience, pacing and perspective*. How many of us have spent a lot of time this year running the race like it was a sprint, when in truth...it is a marathon.

Message Pt. 2:

Well, if we go back to our song...*One Small Year*, it would seem the next verse is something that kind of identifies where many of us have been this year...

The hands of time
They pushed me down the street
They swept me of my feet to this place
And I don't know my face

I can't tell you the number of people I've talked to who through no fault of their own have found themselves pushed down the street and swept away to a place where they don't recognize themselves. A friend of mine lost her job last year and still hasn't really recovered, and this is an all too common theme among us this morning.

In talking with my friend about her situation, anger and disbelief changed to shame and humiliation. This is a person who has worked since she was 15 years old...she's never not had a job until 18 months ago. Her identity, self-worth and sense of being have been tied up in being self-sufficient and giving generously to others. It

As I looked back through all of our services in 2009, I noticed we did talk a lot about getting unstuck...that is to say, how do we deal with all the stuff life throws at us. **Guess Whose Coming to Dinner** was one of those...

Check out the key points of that message:

- **People have always shared meals and time together to nourish our bodies and spirits**
- **Communion is a time of trust and care while intentionally seeking relationship with other.**

A few weeks ago while I was at one of those functions I was rattling off earlier, I was talking to this young couple. When she found out what I "did" she immediately started asking "religious" questions. You know, it's like of like being at a gathering and you find out someone is a doctor, and you immediately say..."hey doc, I've got this rash...right here, would you mind taking a look at it?" So anyway, she started asking about what we Protestants believe, and when it came to communion, she said, you guys actually take communion?

Umm yes...we actually take communion, AND we actually *share* it with others. I went on to explain to her that for "*we Protestants*" communion is very simple and very powerful. It is a way that we remind ourselves that we are part of a community of care...that each time we eat the bread and drink from the cup we are entering a **time of trust and care while intentionally seeking relationship with other**. I didn't dare tell her that here at The Garden we do it with donuts and goldfish and all sorts of other stuff. That would have put her over the edge.

Again though, all kidding aside, the theme that came out of this service is that no matter what, we are all in this thing together.

[Message Pt. 3:](#)

One pervasive theme I noticed that seemed to find it's way into the majority of the services kind of builds off of this idea of being in relationship with one another. What I mean by that is that we really aren't in this thing alone—no matter what happens, no matter how difficult things get God calls us to be good neighbors for each other. It comes from a very simple teaching when Jesus was asked...

'Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?' He said to him, ' "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Matthew 22:36-40a (NRSV)

And this was the essence of our service on May 5th titled *Block Party*. I think someone else already snagged this catchy jingle, but the gist of that service was this..."Like a good neighbor, Gardeners are there." Our key points were this...

- **Being a neighbor isn't always tied to geography—**
- **Being a neighbor is about how we treat others, not what happens after we offer them kindness—**
- **It takes a radical kind of love, and total inclusiveness, to follow Jesus' example of "being a good neighbor".**

In the Gospel teaching of John, he boils it down even more simply..."God is love." As such when we follow Jesus in being good neighbors, we become partners with God in giving a glimpse of what God is all about.

[Message Pt. 4:](#)

Of the many services that seemed to resonate with all of us this past year, the one I'd like to close with is one that seems appropriate as we bring closure to this year, and look forward to next. It is a service called *White Shoes*. Do you remember that one? It was a play on the idea that in many southern states, you're not supposed to wear white shoes before Easter or after Labor Day. The service though, wasn't about summer fashion, it was about how we sometimes hold on to things that prevent us

from being who we want...who God intends.
Listen to these key points:

- Why do we cling to old habits and customs
- God's creative spirit is what gives us life
- Trust in God to open our eyes, hearts, minds and spirits to the new experiences of life.

Well, one old habit many of us cling onto is making a new year's resolution. I've never been too big on them...usually because I set some fantastic, unrealistic, nearly sure to fail resolution, then spend three months feeling guilt about it. However, if resolutions are your thing...go for it.

I think where I'm headed in this new year is that last key point...Trust in God to open our eyes, hearts, minds and spirits to the new experiences of life. I guess the question I'm challenging myself with this year is what kind of world do I want to live in, and what am I going to do about it.

Closing:

What kind of world do you want? I want a world where we can live in peace despite our differences. And one of the best ways I know of to point to our commonality is by sharing a meal...sharing communion together. Just to remind ourselves that we are not alone, please take a piece of donut or bagel with me now, and dip it in whatever you have, and eat. Let's do that now-----AMEN. Have a great Sunday, go in peace.