

"Wake up Call,"

31 July 2005

Bible passage: **Matthew 13: 3-9**

"What do you make of this? A farmer planted seed. As he scattered the seed, some of it fell on the road, and birds ate it. Some fell in the gravel; it sprouted quickly. Some fell in the weeds; as it came up, it was strangled by the weeds. Some fell on good earth, and produced a harvest beyond his wildest dreams.

Are you listening to this? Really listening?"

The term "wake up call" is used for a lot of things. Sometimes it refers to what we do when we're in a hotel: we request a wake up call from the desk so we can be ready at the appointed time the next day. Sometimes it refers to certain events, often traumatic, that served as a wake up call for people. September 11 has been considered that by some when it comes to our national security. In those two instances, we're really talking about something that happens that causes us to act differently.

I want us to think about a wake up call on a more personal level this morning. What is it that causes us to wake up in such a way that we act differently, or we move in a new direction? What is it that causes us to change, or live a different way?

I suppose there are many things we could name. Many times we talk about a mid-life crisis that causes someone to act or think or feel differently from prior to that time. Sometimes it occurs with a birthday, and in reaching a certain age or stage in life, we determine that we're looking at things in a different way from before. Sometimes there are events around us that precipitate a re-evaluation of our lives and a shift in focus, and there are times when something rather insignificant happens, but it affects us in a way that causes us to change.

You may remember the story of Robert Reich, who was the Secretary of Labor and a member of the President's Cabinet. Here was someone in a prestigious position who was totally devoted to the President and to his work. In fact, his work had become his entire life. On his website, he tells the story of something that happened one evening when he had called home for the sixth time in a row to tell his sons, then 15 and 12, that he would miss seeing them before they went to bed.

His 12-year-old, Sam, asked his dad if he would wake him up when he did get home, and Robert Reich said that it would be way too late and he would have been to sleep for hours before he got there. It would be better, Reich told Sam, if he saw him the next morning. Sam listened, but he kept insisting, and when his father asked him why, Sam finally told him that he just wanted to know that his dad was there. In his story, Reich said, "To this day I can't explain precisely what happened at that moment. But I suddenly knew, with utter finality, that I had to leave my job." And he did. His

son's words, for whatever reason, were the words of the wake up call for Robert Reich.

There are other things that precipitate a change in our life direction, and author Sue Monk-Kidd writes about one that happened to her. As I recall, she was standing on a ladder working on Christmas decorations when suddenly she fell and suffered a head injury. It took her a long time to recover, and when she did, she had reassessed the way she was living her life, and her focus changed.

Frankly, the topic for this morning came from an article I read some months ago in (I think) *Indianapolis Monthly* magazine. It was about three or four different people, ordinary folks like you and me, who had experienced a wake-up call of one kind or another. On the day I was working on this sermon, I thought I could go straight to my files and pull out that story for the starting point of the message. However, I searched for two hours and never found it.

I went on the Internet to see if I could find it, but to no avail. I was frustrated and about to give up hope when I checked my email and discovered a "gem" as my friend called it. This gem really caused me to rethink the direction I had been going and consider the bigger picture. You see, a wake up call isn't just about a moment when something changes; it's really about what happens after that moment or event or encounter. That's what the email was about.

Actually, it was entitled "Charles Schultz Philosophy," and it began with asking six questions which I'm going to ask you:

- 1.
2. Name the five wealthiest people in the world
- 3.
- 4.
5. Name the last five Heisman trophy winners.
- 6.
- 7.
8. Name the last five winners of the Miss America contest.
- 9.
- 10.
11. Name ten people who have won the Nobel or Pulitzer Prize.
- 12.
- 13.
14. Name the last half dozen Academy Award winners for best actor and actress.
- 15.
- 16.
17. Name the last decade's worth of World Series winners.
- 18.

How did you do? The point is clear, I think, and it's that most of us fail at remembering the

headliners of yesterday. Glory is fleeting and has a way of becoming old news rather quickly as the applause dies down and achievements are forgotten.

To make that point, the email contained another quiz. Let's see how we do on this one.

*Name a few teachers who aided your journey through school.

*Name three friends who have helped you through a difficult time.

*Name five people who have taught you something worthwhile.

*Think of a few people who have made you feel appreciated and special.

*Think of five people you enjoy spending time with.

Was this one easier? My guess is that it was, and hopefully, we all saw a trend in the persons we named. I would suspect that few of them were rich and famous, but rather, were the persons who have touched our lives and cared, really cared, for us. Am I right?

Maybe our answers to those questions are a type of wake up call. You see, the point of a wake up call is that it moves our lives away from the things that distract us from what really matters in life, and causes us to think, act, feel and live in a different way.

Bob Buford was a very successful business man who made millions in the early days of cable TV, but he experienced a wake up call. He had been driven to be successful, and had gained wealth beyond his wildest imagination. But he was also approaching mid-life, and along with that stage of life came some thoughts he'd had of early dreams and hopes. Then his beloved son drowned tragically, and that served as the ultimate wake up call for him.

Bob Buford changed his entire life, and left as CEO of his company. He had long thought about ministry of some sort or another, but had a different picture in his mind. As a result, he founded an organization called Leadership Network, a group that we at The Garden have benefited from greatly. For example, some of us got to go to a wonderful event sponsored by Leadership Network on innovation and improvisation. Several of us have been involved with one of the multi-site groups that the organization has formed. It's a forward-thinking organization committed to helping churches be the best they can be.

Buford hasn't stopped there, however. Ten years ago now, he wrote a book. It was entitled *Halftime: Changing Your Game Plan from Success to Significance*. Basically, that means that a wake up call moves us from being concerned only about gaining fame and fortune, toward living a life that has greater significance in the long run.

That was really the basic difference between the first set of Charles Schultz questions and the second. The first was only about fame, wealth, prestige as the world sees it, and the second was about impact, touching others, caring for others—significance.

My guess is that if we took a straw vote here this morning, we might be split on the success/significance scale 50/50. That's because I know some here have experienced at least one wake up call, and have changed the direction of their lives. Others are wrestling with the "is that all there is" feeling, having achieved material success, but still feeling empty. Still others are hard-driving toward that elusive thing called success, and haven't yet had the alarm go off in their heads or hearts. Wherever we are, I would like to urge us all to think about this, and ask ourselves what story our lives will tell. Today, would my life, would your life, be best summarized with the word "success" or the word "significance?" That's something for us to think about.

Buford decided he wanted his life to be about significance, and he knew that God could lead him

in that direction. He has a favorite Bible passage that reminds him of what direction he wants to go, and he constantly holds to the story that we find in our Bible passage today. It's from Matthew's gospel, chapter 13, verses 3-9 of *The Message*. In the story, Jesus is telling his listeners:

"What do you make of this? A farmer planted seed. As he scattered the seed, some of it fell on the road, and birds ate it. Some fell in the gravel; it sprouted quickly. Some fell in the weeds; as it came up, it was strangled by the weeds. Some fell on good earth, and produced a harvest beyond his wildest dreams.

Are you listening to this? Really listening?"

There's no way I can say it any better. "Are you really listening? Can you hear the wake up call?"

Closing:

I'm convinced that God is right here with each of us, nudging us toward living a life where we care for one another, where we make a positive impact on those around us. Frankly, God doesn't care where we live, what kind of car we drive, what clubs we belong to or not, what important jobs we have or not. God just loves us and cares for us, and wants us to do the same for others. Are we up to it?

Have a good Sunday, and go in peace. Amen.