



Abiding!

by Mark Brunner

Abiding! (Colossians 3:1-7)

Sometimes I think that people with small noses have a real advantage over those of us with larger noses. The problem is that sometimes our noses just get in the way? My friend, life's a story, ... This Passing Day.

Over 20 years ago when I first tried clearing the land here at Beech Springs of stumps, there were so many of them. Cutting down the trees was enough of a labor; but digging out stumps was even worse. Even with the aid of a stump grinder the work was tedious, noisy and backbreaking. So it is that a good number of stumps still remain here in our little valley. Now, twenty years later, I see stumps somewhat differently. When once they were a reminder of work undone, now they are a convenient and comfortable place to sit and, well, just abide. My perspective has changed over time. It seems that God beckons from time to time to just sit and take in the beauty of this little valley. Where once the stumps advertised regret, they now proclaim something far different; something far more satisfying; they remind me that part of our journey here is to abide as well as to travel. In that respect, I guess stumps are good character builders.

Living life to its fullest is more than just living. I guess it's as much the discovering within ourselves of an abiding spirit of contentment in what sits

at our feet and rests before our noses. Abiding, just abiding, transforms the mundane into something quite character building.

Here's a thought. There is not new thing to be said of you and I. There is no new thing to be said of the mountains for that matter, or of the sea, or of the stars. The years may go their way, but the same old mountains lift their granite shoulders above the drifting clouds, the same mysterious seas beat upon the shores, and the same silent stars keep holy vigil above a tired world. But to mountains and seas and stars men forever stand in awe and wonder; and so with you and I. For we are mountains in the grandeur of our souls; we are the sea in deep under-voice of mystic loneliness; we are the stars in the steadfast purity of purpose and of service. And, we abide; forever in character and love. (H. Hick)

The Apostle Paul wrote: "Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things" (Colossians 3:2). You know it's easier said than done. Life is so busy, so full of entertaining, laboring, caring, speeding to and from. Perhaps the key is abiding; finding some place to, well, just abide for a while. Things above are eternal, without beginning or ending. Things above trump everything here below. I believe that's why it is so hard to live life always with an eye on things above. Living here in this little valley has taught me one thing though; going and coming, doing and making, building and tearing down, however important, don't provide the best platform for thinking about things eternal. For that I've found nothing better than abiding and a stump.

"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matt 6:34)

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Staying Fit In Christ! (Colossians 3:1-17)

Been on any good diets lately? Like anything else, some work and others don't. There is one diet though that's guaranteed to work. Read on to find out more. My friend, life's a story, stayed tuned for more on This Passing Day.

Keeping fit! It's take time, commitment and a plan. It's a process. We apply exercise in just the right amount. Then we add in a balanced, sensible diet along with a healthy plan for sleep. The goal is to burn off existing layers of fat, tone up existing muscle groups, and build new, healthy muscle tissue. In addition, a good regimen of exercise, diet and sleep will also serve to improve our emotions and general mental state. Oh, and just one more thing, while we are talking about it-- don't forget to exercise your brain! Studies have also shown that people who do a lot of reading (the deep serious kind-- no comic books or tabloids), build up new brain cells to replace the old ones that we are losing daily. So, it is really a case of eating, exercising, sleeping and reading that will make you the physical and emotional person that God wants you to be. Sound like a tough ticket? Yes, in some ways it is. Anything that involves discipline is never easy. And, by the way, the odds that you will fail from time to time are quite high. Additional studies have shown that the average American starts and stops 5.5 diets in a lifetime. Even so, it just makes good sense to begin somewhere.

The process of reshaping ourselves into better physical and emotional specimens is very important. What we are today may be only a shadow of what we may be tomorrow. When we set our minds on the process, there is no looking back. Each day, as we make progress on our physical fitness program, we are losing some- thing that we don't need and gain- ing something that we do. That is the whole point of the process.

In the Apostle Paul's message to the Colossians, he writes: ". . . set your hearts on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set you minds on things above, not on earthly things." Paul is asking the Colossians and us to go on a spiritual diet that will eventually end up with a glorious goal--eternal life in Christ! But, like physical dieting, we need to

discipline ourselves and adopt a spiritual diet; denying ourselves the emotional and sinful pleasures of this world. Like physical fitness, it is a process that will take a lifetime. But, it's a process that we can't ignore. Every day we need to lose more of what has made us unacceptable to God and strive to gain those spiritual things that bring us closer to Christ. We need to replace a spirit of revenge with a spirit of forgiveness; bury anger and discover compassion; destroy envy in our lives and bring forth kindness. Today would be a good day to nurture a gentle spirit and remove deceit from our lives. Go on a spiritual diet; deny yourself the pleasures of this life. You'll lose a ton of spiritual baggage in the process and gain eternal life. That's the best diet on earth, or in heaven, for that matter.

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One Nest Is Never Enough! (Colossians 3:1-17)

Most days are pretty boring, aren't they? But, did you know that it is very likely that today is the most special day you will ever be alive? Read on to find out more. My friend, life's a story, stayed tuned for more on This Passing Day.

There is an old adage that, "What you get is never as important as what you become; because what you become determines what you get." I was reminded of this old saying the other day as I watched a pair of Robins build a nest in a seasonal wreath hanging on our front porch. I had already removed one nest and there they were the next day building another, undeterred, on the same spot. What fascinates me is this: Robins, like many birds, aren't content to build just one nest and take their chances on it being the "one." Things happen and the usual plan is to build several. In this case these birds had built

several on our porch, one in a nearby clematis vine and, finally, the actual one they are using behind the backstop on our driveway basketball hoop; in all I counted six nests. Those birds weren't content to just get a nest; they were intent on becoming proficient, efficient nest builders. A good lesson for all of us less industrious folks, often content to just get done and then coast through life.

Here's a story: "The 92-year-old lady, petite, well-poised with her hair fashionably combed and makeup perfectly applied, even though legally blind, moved into a nursing home. Her husband of 70 years had recently passed away. After many hours of waiting patiently in the lobby of the nursing home, she smiled sweetly when told her room was ready. As she maneuvered her walker to the elevator, and a visual description of her tiny room was delivered, she said. "I love it." "Mrs. Jones, you haven't seen the room, just wait." she was told. "That doesn't have anything to do with it," she replied. "Happiness is something you decide on ahead of time. I already decided to love it. It's a decision I make every morning when I wake up. I have a choice; I can spend the day in bed recounting the difficulty I have with the parts of my body that no longer work, or get out of bed and be thankful for the ones that do. Each day is a gift, and as long as my eyes open I'll focus on the new day and all the happy memories I've stored away, just for this time in my life." (Author Unknown)

What a wonderful way to begin the day: becoming something, depending on Christ and "seeking those things" which are worth seeking. Like those Robins, contentment is becoming proficient at life and not just satisfied with where we are at the moment. And, that means we need to be in a frame of mind that is continually looking to the day as "potential to become" and not just another potentially contenting day. We need to decide each day that it really IS the "first day of the rest of our lives;" a time to become something in addition to what we already are. This is what the Lord has always wanted us to do. One nest is never enough when the next one we build may be better, more beautiful than the last.

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Arranging Our Minds! (Colossians 3:1-17)

How do you feel about Sticky Notes? Some may see them as clutter. They do have their place, though, and I believe God has a special love for spiritual ones. My friend, life's a story, stayed tuned for more on This Passing Day.

Since the beginning of our marriage, Holly has always done the bills. She has a unique way of making sure that funds are there when it comes time to make the payments on a purchase or a bill. She writes out the check and dates it for the date when the bill is due. She places the check in a crisp, white envelope and then pins it to the bulletin board above her desk. A number of years ago we purchased a microwave. As with most appliance purchases, each month, for a year, she deposited a check inside the envelope marked "microwave." When the bill came due, she already had the amount due subtracted from her checking account. All she needed to do was write out the check for the amount on the slips and send in the payment. Like a squirrel stashing away supplies for a winter day, Holly always has little accounts stashed everywhere to cover costs when they come due.

As Holly chooses to prepare for each expense, we as Christians we ought to make similar preparations for our hearts making ready for what God will surely bring to pass in each of our lives.

Here's a story: After many hours of waiting patiently in the lobby of the nursing home, a 92-year-old, petite, lady smiled sweetly when told her room was ready. As she maneuvered her walker to the elevator, she was provided with a visual description of her tiny room, including the eyelet sheets that had been hung on her window. "I love it," she stated with the enthusiasm. "Mrs. Jones," the attendant responded. "You haven't seen the room yet." "That

doesn't have anything to do with it," she replied. "Happiness is something you decide on ahead of time. It's how I arrange my mind. I already decided to love it. "It's a decision I make every morning when I wake up. Each day is a gift, and as long as my eyes open I'll focus on the new day and all the happy memories I've stored away – just for this time in my life." (Author unknown)

What a wonderful way to begin the day, depending on Christ and "seeking those things which are above." (Colossians 3:1) Old age is like a bank account. You withdraw from what you've put in. So, my advice to you would be to deposit a lot of happiness in that "bank account of memories." Choose today to bank enough happiness for the days to come. Just like Holly's mini accounts, there will come a time when you need what you've put away and it's good to have it there. Every day IS a gift when we choose to love each one for what they are—uniquely chosen by God and custom fit to His purposes.

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Bears, And There Are Bears! (Colossians 3:1-17)

Are you a bear in the morning? Often we are told not to be. However, when it comes to living, we really ought to choose what type of bear we would like to be. My friend, life's a story, stayed tuned for more on This Passing Day.

It's our nature to think that with a little bit, there must always be more. When it comes to sufficiency, we're often prone to reject the small amount always in favor of the larger. For example, recently my daughter Sarah dropped off a container of fresh cherries that she had picked from the tree in her backyard. I love cherries and especially love topping a bowl of vanilla ice cream with a

mound of tart cherries. And, that's just what I did that very evening the cherries arrived. First I scooped three large scoops of ice cream into my bowl and dumped the cherries liberally over the vanilla mounds. It was good, but the ice cream somewhat overpowered the taste of the cherries. So, the next evening I reduced the ice cream to two scoops and, you know what, the whole thing tasted better. It wasn't the larger amount of ice cream that benefited the taste. Two scoops were sufficient. If only we'd approach everything in life that way—with sufficiency before what we perceive as need.

Here's a story: Bears are all considered extremely dangerous and, what's more, they're fascinated by the non-natural foods that humans eat. Once a bear is "addicted" to human food, it can't control its desires and it will do anything to obtain it. According to one Vancouver Island guide in Tofino, British Columbia, however, Vancouver Island doesn't experience such bear attacks, and humans can live alongside bears peacefully. So why are the island bears less aggressive than the mainland bears? The primary reason is that there are so many natural food sources on the island that the bears don't have to rely on human food for survival! Being omnivorous (eating both plant and animal life), the island bears have an abundant choice of berries, plants and fish. No one has ever sighted a bear attacking other wildlife. It seems that when a bear has an abundant food source, there's simply no reason to look for food elsewhere! (Rob Chaffart)

Like that bear, your old life is dead when God is sufficient in your life. We don't need to go off seeking another food. The bread of life is sufficient; it's the only real food that gives eternal life. With Jesus as our reality, He will provide for all of our needs beyond our expectations: God can do anything, you know—far more than you or I could ever imagine or guess or request in our wildest dreams! He does it not by pushing us around but by working within us, his Spirit deeply and gently within us. How do you live your life? Are you a mainland bear or an island bear? Hungry? Come to the source of abundant food: the living bread that came down from heaven, Jesus Christ. He is all-sufficient; our fulfilling two scoops when the rest of the world is vainly seeking three.

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