



*Rev. Chris Taylor - 7.07.19*

*"The Seeds We Plant"*

*Galatians 6:7-16*

Bonnie and I watched Captain Marvel the other night. Very fun movie. Towards the beginning, one of the characters, played by Jude Law, tells our hero that he has been doing everything he can to help her become her best self. We believe him, and clearly so does she. It is one of the nice twists in the movie that at the end we find this same mentor saying the exact same thing, only this time both we and Captain Marvel know better. Over the course of the movie it has become very clear that he was far more interested in holding her back.

So when we turn to Scripture which mentor do we find in these pages – the one who wants to hold us back, or the one who is there to help us realize life at its fullest and best?

I think we sometimes get the idea that God is holding out on us and keeping the good stuff from us. There are those who are sure that God is in it for God's self, and that as a result the guidance we find in Scripture is both constraining and oppressive. But that's not the God revealed in Jesus. The God we see there is all in: wholly and completely for us – a God who wants the best for us and is constantly at work to bring us life.

When we realize where God is coming from we begin to grasp what an incredible gift God has given us in Scripture. The guidance we find in these pages is like the guidance the stars once offered to sailors amid the vast expanse of the sea: it shows us how to get where we long to go.

Our passage this morning is a case in point: "You reap what you sow." The phrase is part of our lexicon. We've heard it in a hundred different settings. But what does it actually mean for us when we take it seriously? First and foremost, it means we have a choice in our words and our actions. We aren't victims. We aren't passive observers. We aren't pawns moved around by great spiritual forces. We have a choice about the kind of lives we are going to live. And second, it

means those choices have consequences. They are either going to bring us life, or they are going to push us further and further away from the Kingdom of God and all that is life-giving.

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Up in Erie where we now keep our boat, Bonnie and I have found ourselves part of a little neighborhood among the boats around us. The woman directly across from us appears to be the emotional center. Joanne sets up her chair on the dock (she loves to sit in the sun), and then greets people as they pass. She is always smiling, always friendly. I can hear her distinctive laughter even when I'm down below working on our boat. People stop to chat. Some of them will pull up chairs and share a drink. If they are heading into town they will call out and ask if she needs anything.

The point is, she cares about people. She chooses to reach out to them, and these are the seeds she sows. The community that has built up around her, and the care and affection that people have for her and for her husband – that's the harvest that her choices have generated.

If our character was written in stone, if we didn't have choices, Paul wouldn't bother talking about sowing and reaping. There would be no point. But he does talk about sowing and reaping precisely because we do have choices. We can choose what kind of person we're going to be when we climb behind the wheel of our car; when we're standing in line waiting for the slowest cashier in history; when we have the chance to cut corners at work or overcharge a client, or give ourselves a better lie on the golf course.

And those choices matter because they shape the kind of person we become. There is both light and darkness that is a part of each one of us. There is the part that was created by God – good and true and full of light. And there's the part tainted by sin and by our own brokenness; the part that is selfish and self-serving. As the old proverb puts it, the part that thrives, the part that wins, is the part we choose to feed.

Think about JoJo Bradshaw – many of you knew her. She was a long-time member of this family who recently passed into the kingdom. If anyone had reason to throw up her hands and be the victim, it was JoJo. She lost her husband to Huntington's. She had to go back to work because he could no longer practice

medicine. She lost her daughter to the same disease, and even as she struggled with the COPD that eventually took her, she knew her son was gradually being taken by Huntington's, as well.

People would talk about poor JoJo and it was awful, but JoJo was never the victim. She faced these things head on, and if you knew her you know that each and every day she still chose love, she still chose light and laughter. It was a very conscious choice for her, and some days, as she told me, the choice was harder than others.

You may not feel love, but you can still choose it. You can choose to do what is loving and kind, even when what you are feeling is something altogether different. Keep making that choice, day in and day out, and eventually you might just find that the feelings will follow.

The same holds true with our possessions. Our instinct is to hold onto every cent we can in this culture that places such a high value on wealth and accumulation. But we can choose a different route. We can choose generosity and we can choose compassion. There is a reason why Scripture calls us to give ten percent. God doesn't need our money, but we need to give it. Our lives are so much richer and more meaningful when we do. It is a choice that feeds our soul.

You reap what you sow.

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You may remember Glenn McDonald. He preached here a number of years ago. He once shared the story of a Taiwanese artist named Candy Chang. While grieving the loss of a loved one, she moved to a neighborhood in New Orleans that had never really recovered from the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. It was an area filled with the sense of death of decay. One house in particular stood out. It looked like something out of a horror movie; abandoned and boarded up.

With the permission of the owner, Chang and a few friends nailed planks to the side of the house and then painted everything black. Then Chang painted in large white letters, "Before I die..." Below that she stenciled the same phrase some 80 times: "Before I die I want to \_\_\_\_." Then she and her friends left pieces of chalk in case those passing by wanted to think about the meaning of their lives and fill in the blanks.

There was no publicity about the effort, and there wasn't much foot traffic on that particular street, so Chang didn't necessarily expect much when she returned the next morning. When she did, she was stunned to find that every single blank had been filled in. Their depth and breadth were poignant and powerful. "Before I die I want to..."

*See my daughter graduate*  
*Abandon all insecurities*  
*Sing for millions*  
*Eat all the carbs I want*  
*Be someone's cavalry*  
*Slow down for a moment and maybe even stop*  
*Straddle the International Date Line*  
*Tell my mother I love her*  
*See the leaves change many times*  
*Forgive myself*  
*See my son overcome addiction*  
*Love recklessly*  
*Plant a tree*  
*Hold her one more time*  
*Have a student come back and tell me it mattered*  
*Follow my childhood dream*  
*See the world and all its people through the eyes of God*  
*Be completely myself*

Chang wanted to give others the same chance to reflect, and so she erased all the messages. Once again, by the next morning all the blanks were filled in and so a movement began. Today there are more than 4,000 "Before I Die" walls in 75 countries, written in chalk in 36 different languages.

We get one shot at this gift of life. What we do matters. It matters in this life. Even more, it is the substance of what we carry with us into all eternity. So how would you fill in that blank? If you were at the end of your life and looking back, what's the one thing you are going to wish that you had done? Or looking forward, what one thing are you hoping to do before you die?

We each have a choice, and make no mistake, that choice matters. In life and in death we reap what we sow.