

“Has Beens and Will Bes”

1: Corinthians 1:18-31

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Introduce theme:

Like many folks over the Christmas holiday, I was trapped inside with my family. We played games, we watched movies, and thankfully there was a MythBusters marathon on the Discovery channel. If you're not familiar with this show I suggest you start watching because it's fascinating, educational, as well as hilarious. There are a group of folks who take the time to test every myth possible to see if it is fact, or fiction. One episode tested the myth that if you ate a Mentos and drank diet coke your stomach could explode.¹ I thought this was ironically close to the playground myth I grew up with that involved pop rocks and soda. The pop rocks myth turns out is fiction; I know, my friends tried it. We weren't very calculated about it, but turns out we were some of the original "myth busters." The show, however, dropped a series of Mentos, into a variety of containers. They discovered that depending upon the environment, this combination could either be a

¹ Season 2, Episode 6

volatile explosion, or a pleasing jolt of sugar. In an empty container this pair creates a sticky, explosive geyser; but when our bodies are the container, we have a way of neutralizing this explosion. We don't experience the gut busting affects of this combination, but instead just simply enjoy the fun that comes with sugar in our system. When we put seemingly opposite things into one space they can create a lot of tension, or they can create something new, or in this case, a reenergized you.

Introduce text:

While Mythbusters may confront the “deep” questions of everyday life, Paul confronts some of the perplexing questions of the church. The church of Corinth is a paradoxical combination of very different types of people; and Paul writes to them, hoping this mix would produce more of the re-energized result, rather than the exploding geyser of a faith community. The world that Paul lived operated with a strong sense of wisdom found in financial power. Money in this point of history was extremely important, and granted you much more power than even in today's culture. Paul recognizes there are some tremendously wealthy people within the church, who by

cultural understanding, were deemed the “wise.” The large majority of this congregation, however, were not part of this elite class and instead were seen as the “discerning.” Wisdom and cultured speech earned you prestige in this culture. There was no middle class at this time so the economic pyramid of the culture was very extreme. Paul speaks to the Corinthians who were continually fighting for status, rather than working with one another. They were not fighting over some theological ideal; instead, they were grappling for their very own ego. Though this text Paul openly addresses the tremendous disparity within this church. This was, a church of haves, and have nots, instead of the community of Christ.

Body

While our culture still operates with haves and have nots, we have developed a middle class and have thankfully made some steps towards eliminating the economic pyramid of people. Even though we still have many strides to take in alleviating poverty in our world, something that we face more readily in the church is the difference between the “wise” has beens, and the “discerning” will bes.

Many of our experienced leaders in the church are actively running the many ministries of the church and running themselves into exhaustion. If you are not doing this at the moment, it's probably because you became so very burned out with all this doing, that you no longer have anything to give. It can easily feel like your experience and leadership are underappreciated, or go unnoticed. Spiritual writer Henri Nouwen claims "The great paradox of our time is that many of us are busy and bored at the same time." When we run and run and run, packing more and more responsibility upon ourselves, we not only fail to really live our faith, but we then forget the joy that comes with that faith. Busyness and leadership does not always mean a true engagement with God or others. Without these connections with others you can miss God, and opportunities for sharing or empowering ministry. You can look around, see young people not stepping up and feel frustrated, just waiting for the day when they "will be" the leaders.

Many young people are building the foundation of their own lives, families, homes, careers, and have new ideas different than the leaders of previous generations. While you have ideas for how you would like things to be, there is no place for you to assert your ideas, or create a slightly different ministry. If you have tried to share these ideas you

have probably received cool reception and perhaps maybe a sense, of hesitancy toward something a little new or different. Children's author Gordan Mackenzie conducted a very un-scientific study when he would visit elementary schools. He would always ask the gathered students how many artists were in the room. The number of hands raised in the air always depended upon the age of the students. Almost all Kindergartners or 1st graders would shoot their hands into the air, but 4th or 5th graders seemed to hesitate if they raised their hands at all. He guesses this reserved behavior resulted from "a time—perhaps when you were very young—when you had at least a fleeting notion of your own genius and were just waiting for some authority figure to come along and validate it for you. But none ever came." When you're given the message that your ideas are for a later time, or you need a more experienced person's approval, creativity and vision diminish. When you stop believing in your own glimpse of genius God, you stop sharing it with others, and your dreams will never be added to what "has been" in the past.

Well, no one wants to be told they're a "will be;" nor do others want to hear they're a "has been." When we take on the idea that we are the only leaders, or the only way of doing things, we then run ourselves

down, forgetting the joy of living church. When we think we need to have the approval or overwhelming support of our elders to live our ideas, our faith can begin to diminish. No matter where you are on your faith journey you need to continue to be playful, living the joy of discovering God in new and exciting ways. We don't have to be a church of has been people, or will be leaders. We can choose to be a space for excited elders and genius young adult to co-create the church if we work, love, and listen, together. No matter where you find yourself on your faith journey, you have wisdom to share, and more wisdom to learn. The beauty of the church is that we are one of the last places where the generations can actually come together. These intersections of ages create a dynamic space to grow and share in faith, if we allow each other to be both teachers and students. Paul tells the church of yesterday and today, that our church and faith are exactly these paradoxical pairings; and when these seemingly opposites interact in a willing space, the impossibilities of one understanding, are transformed into the possibilities of God's understanding.

Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen, physician and counselor to terminally ill patients knew a woman who embodied this space of receiving God's possibility. Jesse has struggled the last 15 years with cancer, and

though “her own life has not been easy; nonetheless she is a celebrator, a deeply happy person.”² Once as the two women waited in a doctor’s office, Dr. Remen asked Jesse about this joy in her life and if she was ever envious of others who had things she did not. With a very serious look on her face, she responded, “no.” Seeing the befuddled look on De. Remen’s face, she continued on explaining “that it seemed to her that joy was not something personal ... she had found that if you are genuinely happy for them, people are very generous with their joy and share it with you openheartedly. [She continued on saying] ‘When something good happens to the person next to me, I am there to celebrate it with them.... I rejoice with them about it as fully as if it was happening to me. It makes me really happy.’ Thoughtfully pausing, she continued saying, ‘Of course, then it *is* happening to me.”³ Our joy, our faith is not our own. God is to be shared. God can be experienced in so MANY ways that it takes an entire community of different ages, people, and perspectives sharing and celebrating with one another, as Jesse shares and experiences other’s joy, to live the breadth of the Spirit. Anytime we share someone’s joy, we bless the life in them; we experience the

² Rachel Naomi Reman, *My Grandfather’s Blessings* (The Berkley Publishing Group, 2000), p. 214

³ *Ibid*, p. 215

blessing of God within them, and we then become the church. The church is not a building, but rather any place where people authentically share and experience God.

Challenge

We are a faith of paradox. One form of wisdom would say that God could not show power through a vulnerable infant. One form of wisdom would judge Jesus' ministry with the poor and outcasts as shameful. Paul reminds us that God has proven *this* form of thinking as the true foolishness. Paul asks the people of Corinth to remove this understanding of wisdom and instead, to allow the life of Jesus to become our source for wisdom.

Christ's model of wisdom was one that told the disciples to not stop children from running to him exactly as they are, as laughing, stumbling, messy children. He didn't see children as future leaders of the church, but rather, learned from them how to joyfully laugh and play with God. Christ's model of wisdom saw the young adult fishermen not as people who needed mentored in the ways things had been, but instead, empowered them to live out their ministry *now and into the future*. Christ's model of wisdom saw the elderly not as people of the

past to be ignored, but as storytellers to listen to and care for. Christ's model of wisdom shows us that violence does not create justice; instead, only through the lens of love can we create life. Mother Teresa describes this when she stated, "I have found the paradox that if I love until it hurts, then there is no more hurt, but only more love." Though the lens of Christ we see wisdom when we can come together to genuinely listen to and then love one another exactly as we are in that moment. Through the lens of Christ we see that no matter our age or experiences in life, we always have something to learn, as well as something to teach about God. At any age we can experience God through a silly song, or a meditative prayer. Through these types of combinations we create a church, that then becomes the body of Christ today; which is a space of paradoxical creation.

Celebration:

You won't be a Christian later, you are one now! You never outgrow finding God in laughter and silliness. You don't have to be a leader of the future, or of the past to embody God – you can do that right now. Live today the wise process of continual learning. Imagine if you put an 80 year old, and an 8 year old into the same room, what do think

might happen? It might sound a little heated or messy, but it could also explode into the creation of hot volcanic lava and cool ocean waters. Through this opposing mix beautiful, lush islands full of life are created. The laughter and stories shared when many generations mix create the living church of today. Together, we can create the dynamic space for the body of Christ grow and live in our world. That may not be an explosion, but it sure is a burst of life! Amen, and thanks be to God!