

Sermon The Harvest – a Family Service
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Tolstoy's three questions:

1. What is the best time to do each thing?
2. Who are the most important people to work with?
3. What is the most important thing to do at all times?

What do these three questions have to do with being a church?

About thirteen of us attended the Enneagram seminar yesterday. Anyone here care to hazard a guess as to which category the queen belonged? She's in a position of power but still wants to make sure she's using her time wisely:

- What was the right time to begin everything?
- Who were the right people to listen to, and whom to avoid?
- What was the most important thing to do?

(One?)

Lesson on the unreliability of Wikipedia:

“The most important time is NOW.

The most important person is who you are.

The most important thing is to do good to the person you are with.” (Dan Hotchkiss corrected this error while I was preaching! Thanks, Dan.)

[“Remember that there is only one important time and that is now. The present moment is the only time over which we have dominion. The most important person is always the person you are with, who is right before you, for who knows if you will have dealings with any other person in the future? The most important pursuit is making the person standing at your side happy, for that alone is the pursuit of life.”]

The most important time is now.

The most important person is the one you are *with*.

The most important pursuit is to do good *to* that person.

Why do you think the Wikipedia editor made that mistake?

I think it was more than just forgetting to type in the word “with.”

I think it was because we are so used to being told that we are the most important people in our lives.

Tolstoy's story gives us a whole new take on the Golden Rule.

To treat the person who is right before us as we would want to be treated.

How do we want to be treated; to be made happy and whole.

I spoke a few weeks ago about the idea of planting roots and seeds. I said:

“For some church is a place where they plant roots.

To have security and stability.
For others is where they plant seeds. In the wider world.
To experiment and be challenged to do new things.
For some it's a place to belong.
For others it's a place to be changed."

I said:

"...bring back to us the things that you care deeply about, the things you have found transformational, the things you've been dying to do, and to have some company in the doing of it.

I asked:

"Who do you want to be?
What do you want to be?
What do you want to change?
Where do you want to be effective?
How can we help you be that? Do that?"

I preached:

"Take from us that which will nourish you.
Give to us what will nourish others."

Today we'll talk about nourishing, feeding others as a way of growing ourselves.
Think of yourself as a gardener or a farmer.
And the roots to plant and the seeds to sow are ideas and interest and good will and kindness.
And the things to harvest are delight and satisfaction and wholeness and healing.

So listen to the answers to Tolstoy's questions
and see how they fit together with this idea of planting and harvest.

The most important time is now; not the past, not the future.
When we cultivate the richness of this place, of being together, it is good to remember:
The seed that we plant is not one that will fix all the bad and hurtful things of the past.
It will not guarantee a hypothetical future.
The seed that we plant will thrive
only if we are prepared to treat the present ground with kindness and knowledge.
It cannot wait for the future.
It cannot wait for chance.
We are the nurturer of the now.
We feed the hungry and the poor in spirit *now*,
we don't conserve for the future, or put it off until we are feeling better ourselves.
The person we are with now will carry our message, our very being, forward.
Those who receive our generosity and forgiveness now will pass it on to others – that is the only effect
we can guarantee to have on the future.

The most important person is **not** *me*, the most important person is the one I am with.
What do you think he means by that?
Continue with the metaphor of planting and harvesting.
I am not a gardener. I have beautiful ideas in my head. I learn all the names of plants.

Everywhere I visit I learn about the wildflowers and growing things around me.
But I don't take care of what goes in the ground. I don't remember to water or to feed or nourish or tend.

Some of us get preoccupied with what's going on inside of us
and that becomes more important than how we are with others.

Can we be a good person inside our heads and hearts
without doing something good outside of us with our heads and hearts and hands?
That's one of Tolstoy's answers. The most important person is the one I am with.
Sure, we can be good people, without doing good for others, but we can be better than that.
We must strive to be better.

What can keep us from paying attention and caring about someone else?
If we have bad feelings inside – anger, sadness, hurt, fear.
If we're ambitious and really want to win the game or make more money.
If we're thinking hard about something and not paying attention to the people around us.
These things can keep us from noticing others, or caring about others, or the bare ground upon which we walk.

How can we be better? I'll tell you how I think I can be better:
I become a better person by recognizing all
the bad or hurt or neglectful feelings inside and saying to myself:
"Okay, this lousy stuff happened to me," or,
"I feel hurt inside," or,
"It's hard to care right now,"
but "I'll find a way to deal with it and I won't just ignore this person right in front of me,
or go do the same hurtful thing to someone else."
I become a better person when I deal with what's on my mind or on my heart,
and open myself to others.

A gardener is someone who makes growing things abundant or beautiful
no matter what's going on inside his head or heart.
I won't become a better person just because I *think* I will. I'll become a better person by what I *do*.

I am the sower of the seed, and the person I am with is the rich ground to receive my message, my kindness.
The most important pursuit is to do good to that person.
To feed that person.
To care about that person.
To let abundance speak, and caution stay silent.

What do these three questions have to do with being a church? Everything.