

Up, In, and Out

14th Weekend in Kingdomtide – August 20/21, 2005

Sermon Background Study

Micah 6:6,8 (NRSV)

⁶With what shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before God on high?

⁸He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

Luke 6:12-20 (NRSV)

¹²Now during those days he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God. ¹³And when day came, he called his disciples and chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles: ¹⁴Simon, whom he named Peter, and his brother Andrew, and James, and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, ¹⁵and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Simon, who was called the Zealot, ¹⁶and Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

¹⁷He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. ¹⁸They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. ¹⁹And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

²⁰Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

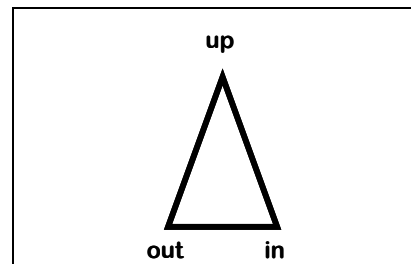
“Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

Today, we turn to our first LifeShape¹: the triangle. This shape draws our attention to the relationships in our lives. Our relationship with God (up), our relationship with the community of believers (in), and our relationship with the world (out). Truly passionate lives are grounded in the love of God and love of neighbor.

What is it about three? We proclaim to the world the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are created by God to be whole persons – head (intellect), heart (feelings), and hands (doing). And now – up, in, and out – God, community, and world.

Looking UP to God

Our quest to be passionate disciples, to lead passionate lives, must begin with our relationship with God, the UP in the triangle. We must ask ourselves, “Do I have an intimate relationship with God?” I don’t think any of us doubt the power of intimacy. Those few persons in our lives with whom we are truly intimate are those whom we trust without reservation. Richard Foster writes that we are invited into the living room of God’s heart, where “we can put on old slippers and share freely.” I like that image. It speaks to me of peace, serenity, openness, and honesty – true intimacy. Jesus called God the Father, *abba*, meaning something like “papa.” Paul writes that we can refer to God as *abba* also. God desires a personal and intimate relationship with each of us.



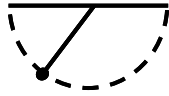
What could be simpler to remember: up (intimacy with God), in (fellowship with the community of others), and out (building for the kingdom of God in all God’s creation). The diagram is great for the visual learners among us. Tactile/kinesthetic learners can even stand up and extend arms upward, inward, and then outward.

The genius of the LifeShapes is not that they tell us innovative ways to be disciples. Rather, they help us to live out the disciple’s life. The LifeShapes offer us a vocabulary of discipleship. We might ask ourselves, “How’s my UP?,” or “How’s my IN,” or “How’s my OUT?” Am I pursuing a balanced discipleship or am I more like a two-legged stool? Could I even be trying to support myself on a single leg? Simple questions, yet profound in our quest to be passionate disciples.

¹This sermon series draws upon the work of Breen and Kallestad, as presented in *A Passionate Life*. This book is available in Inspiration, the St. Andrew bookstore. Copies are also being sold in the Narthex on Sunday mornings. We hope that you’ll pick up a copy.

But how do we find our way to an intimate relationship with God? Mike Breen calls it digging for God's presence. From the beginning, Christians have engaged in certain practices, certain disciplines, that help us to dig. These include bible study, prayer, retreat, fasting, meditation, worship, work (yes, see Colossians 3:23), service, simplicity, and more. The lists may vary somewhat from Christian to Christian, but these practices form the core of our apprenticeship to Jesus. This is how we come to truly embrace God as *abba*.

It might surprise you just a bit to see worship on the list. It is hard to imagine that there is anything intimate about an activity we share with a thousand people! But we can worship in private as well as in



The second of the LifeShapes is a semicircle. Its purpose is to help us grasp the rhythms of our lives and the importance of Sabbath.

Imagine that the semicircle is a pendulum swinging back and forth. From times that we are *resting* to times that we are *working*, from *abiding* to *fruitfulness*. In the busyness of our often frantic lives, it is easy to forget that God created and rested.

Jesus understood this well and lived it out. Luke writes, "But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed" (5:16). On numerous occasions, Jesus' work resumes after a time of resting and praying.

Nobody can really go all out, all the time and no one should. Burn-out is real and it can wreck our relationships and our work.

We are to work for God's kingdom and we are to be fruitful, hard-working. Yet, the biblical view is that we can only be truly fruitful if we also rest, if we take time to listen, to recoup. To use Paul's metaphor, a disciple's life may be a foot race (Philippians 3:14), but it is not a sprint. We can't respond to God's love with loving hearts of our own, when those hearts are burned out and used up. We can find the passionate lives we seek only if we make time to rest.

public, in our cars as well as in the sanctuary. Worship literally means worth-ship. To worship is to accord true value to someone, to recognize and respect that person's worth. Our worship of God certainly cannot be confined to a particular place or time. When or where is God not worthy? N.T. Wright captures the sense of this in the title of a book on worship: *For All God's Worth*.

When we gather to worship as a congregation, it is not about ourselves, it is about God; not our own worthiness, but God's. As much as I enjoy seeing all my friends at worship on Sunday mornings, I have to remind myself that our purpose in gathering is not social. I have to remind myself that I am not part of the "audience." God is the audience. I have to remind myself that I shouldn't be asking how the preacher performed or even the choir. I should be asking myself how I performed. How's my UP?

Living IN Community

As believers, we live in community with the entire body of Christ, numbering billions of people living and dead, we live in community here at St. Andrew, and we live in community with believers in smaller groups. Perhaps it is choir, or a Sunday School class, or a mission ministry, or . . . well, it could be lots of groups, but the point is belonging. The IN of our triangle speaks to our relationships with other believers and, in particular, small groups. None of us can maintain personal and meaningful relationships with large numbers of people, not even large numbers of disciples. We can only manage a few, but those few are essential to our emotional and spiritual health.

"Belongingness" is about fellowship, encouragement, support, nurturing, accountability, and more. The Bible uses a great deal of "family" language to talk about the people of God because we are a family and God is our *abba*. Though we can find some of this in larger groups, much of it will only grow out of smaller groups, where we have the time to build trusting relationships, where we can truly take care of one another, where we can give

as well as receive. In the coming weeks, we'll be talking more about the importance of small groups in our discipleship

Reaching OUT to the world

Next week, we'll concentrate more on the OUT dimension of the triangle, our relationship with the world, with all those who do not know Jesus, with all those who live in misery. We are to be the light to the world, the salt of the earth. We are to make disciples of all people in all places. We are to care for the poor and stand up for the oppressed. We are to press relentlessly for social justice. We are to evangelize, proclaiming far and wide that Jesus is Lord. Most of us have heard this call and most of us desire to fulfill it. But so often, the question is . . . how? It is easy to be passive about the OUT, to let others come to us, to write a few checks and move on. Is this it? How active does God really expect us to be? What does a healthy OUT really look like? More next week.

Daily Bible Readings

(more on UP and IN)

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p>Day 1 Psalm 77 When we think that God isn't listening, that he doesn't desire intimacy with us, we can recall God's great acts and mighty deeds. God is there!</p>	<p>Day 2 1 Kings 19:11-18 Elijah meets God at Mt. Horeb, hearing God in "a sound of sheer silence."</p>
<p>Day 3 Ephesians 2:11-22 Being one <i>in</i> Christ [the "you" here should be read as "y'all."] Most of the time, Paul writes to the body of believers, not to individuals.</p>	<p>Day 4 Luke 5:1-11 Jesus calls the first disciples, entering into an entry-level covenant with them.</p>
<p>Day 5 Acts 2:43-47 & 6:1-6 Can you find the UP, the IN, and the OUT in these accounts of the first Christian community?</p>	<p>Weekly Prayer Concerns</p>

Sermon Notes

August Book Recommendation

A Passionate Life, by Mike Breen and Walt Kallestad

Do you have passion in your life? Are you passionate about your faith? Are you a passionate disciple of Jesus? We know that passion is key to a fulfilled, happy, and productive life. But passion seems to elude so many of us. Did you ever see another Christian and say to yourself, "I want some of that!" This is the book that underlies the current sermon and teaching series. It is an easy read, but still filled with many helpful, easy-to-remember, and challenging teachings. We hope that you will pick up a copy in the bookstore and read it during the coming weeks.

Fall Bible Academy course schedule and registration is now on-line at www.standrewccl.org. We've got a great line-up. Check it out!

This fall, the St. Andrew Bible Academy will be offering a large variety of classes at convenient times. Regardless of your personal Bible background there is a place for you in the Academy. The courses are designed to challenge those who are just beginning to explore the Bible and the Christian faith, as well as those who have been faithful students for many years. Classes begin the week of Sept. 12.

Classes include *Introducing the Bible: The Drama of Scripture*; *God Is Closer Than You Think*; *David: A Man After God's Own Heart*; *Genesis: The Beginning*; *Is That You, God?*; *Know Why You Believe*; *Why We Are Methodists*; and *Learning from Those Who Have Gone Before Us: A History Lesson on the Christian Church*.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

Begin this week by re-reading today's Scripture passage from Luke. In it, we see Jesus' own UP, IN, and OUT. He goes up the mountain to pray, spending the night in intimate conversation with God (UP). Then, he goes down and forms a group of twelve disciples around himself and begins to teach them (IN). Finally, he begins to heal and to teach the multitudes who have come looking for him. Jesus enacts among them the coming of God's kingdom (OUT).

The LifeShape triangle calls us to self-assessment. How are you on the UP? The IN? The OUT? Do you find yourself to be a "two-axis" Christian? For example, strong on the IN and the OUT, but weak on the UP? Perhaps, if you are honest with yourself, you might even be a "one-axis" Christian. Many are. Can you think of other Christians who seem to be healthy on all three dimensions? How would you characterize their faith – at least so far as it seems to you? Do those three-dimensional Christians seem to be passionate disciples?

How might we begin to be better three-dimensional Christians, disciples who stand on a well-balanced three-legged stool? What practices or activities might help? What else? Who can help us in this? How? What do you think are the biggest barriers to our progress?