

# How To Gain Weight

Sermon, May 22, 2016

Trinity Sunday

Texts: Romans 5:1-5; II Timothy 3:10-17

I've discovered the older I get, the more my understanding of what makes a person attractive changes. In my younger years, what I used to consider attractive was somewhat shaped by the media images I would see in magazines, and billboards, and movies, and TV shows. You know what I mean: people with sleek bodies, beautiful faces, sparkly teeth, heads full of rich, thick, non-gray hair always somehow blowing in the breeze, and they wore cool clothes as they headed off to exciting jobs in shiny buildings, the energy and vitality just bursting out all over. Yes, I'm still influenced by some of these images to a degree, but the older I get, the more I'm actually somewhat bemused by them ... it is all so very fleeting ... and the more I am drawn to a different type of attractiveness, the attractiveness of *weight*. We would all do well to gain weight!

I know some of you probably thinking, "Well, I can do that! This shouldn't be too challenging." Or, "The pastor certainly looks like he knows what he's talking about on that." I'm talking, though, of a different kind of weight, a weight all of us should want gain. In fact, by the end of the sermon, I'm hoping you'll see the church as something of a spiritual health spa where we go to gain (not lose) real weight. By the way, that is not a plug for the coffee hour refreshments following worship or our church picnic coming up, though we do hope you'll enjoy both! Again, though, I'm talking of a different kind of weight, the kind of weight which is a condition of a soul ... the condition of a soul that has so grown and expanded and developed that it has something of a genuine spiritual "mass" about it, enough mass that it has developed almost a type of gravity, an attractive force, which draws others into its orbit, a soul that has so grown and enlarged that it just garners honor and respect; it has no need to demand honor, it just engenders it.

I'm sure each one of you knows someone (or someones) you would consider a person of "weight." People of depth and wisdom, people who you just want to be around, people you want your children to get to know, people who have the most extraordinary insights and great ideals about them. These people inspire us. We respect their judgment. We trust them for good guidance and advice; these are people who give us a sense of stability and security and safety. Their immensity has come in part from scars that have healed well and failures that have been redeemed and forgiven and learned from. These are people who exude genuine-ness and character and trustworthiness, people with large souls we gravitate to like planets that draw us into their orbit. Such people are an inspiration, filling us with the desire to do better; they are honorable and significant people that call forth the best that is in us.

"Honor" comes from the Hebrew *kavod*, a root that means "to be heavy, weighty." The same word "Kavod" is often translated in English as "glory." I've mentioned this in years past, but when the Old Testament Jew spoke of the Glory of God, he spoke of the *weightiness* of God. Now, that's not to imply that God is somehow overweight, that He is sitting on His divine throne bellowing, "Hey, hey, hey!" down through the ages. No; to the Jew, God was the epitome of Weighti-ness, He was the ultimate Significance, the number one "Heavy." We use the same imagery today in English. Something that is laden with significance, something that is full of meaning and/or importance is *heavy*, weighty. Or, conversely, when something is fluffy, insignificant, frivolous, we say it is "light." When we are treated as if we were insignificant, when we are snubbed, we say we were treated *lightly*, as if we had no weight, no significance, no glory, nothing worthy of engendering respect. Biblically, glory and honor carry with it this idea of weight, "Kavod." One who has *kavod* is one who carries weight, one who is significant, one who is treated with respect and honor. Being THIS kind of a heavyweight is a desirable thing!

*(the following was edited out for time; I include it here) If such people are like planets, others are like pinballs. Not like large planetary globes with gravitas plodding their own steady orbits, but like little pinballs desperately bouncing back and forth, to and fro, driven here and there not by lofty convictions and eternal principles, but by the flippers and obstacles and demands they encounter, just trying to resist the inevitable plunge to the bottom. Such people don't always have high ideals or principles or moral visions which drive them; they are just driven in life by whatever they encounter, the prevailing "mood" or "opinion" of the day, just trying to stay out of the gutter and hoping to hit the occasional bonus. And back and forth the pinball bounces, taking no time or energy to consider the weighty things .... like where this is all headed, are there great ideals to my life, and what, if any, is the significance of my life's efforts.*

In our epistle reading from Timothy, Paul is writing to his young protégé and aspiring pastor and gives something of a Nutrisystem three part weight *gain* prescription plan, a three step plan on how to gain good weight, gravitas, credibility, stability, purpose and to be a person of genuine weight. Paul says

in so many words that “weight gain” comes through (1) living godly lives in the face of resistance, (2) keeping rooted in your faith **tradition**, and through (3) reading and studying and living by the **Scripture**.

Paul says, *“In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”* Living a godly life takes tenacity, discipline, it takes the exercising of principles in the face of resistance against those principles... these are great ideals, weighty ideals worthy of our lives. Here in worship we speak about such weighty ideals, like believing our lives were created for a holy purpose, not just for the satisfying of our appetites; great and motivating and wholesome ideals like believing we are citizens of the Kingdom of God who live our lives *differently* precisely because we are citizens of this Kingdom. As Paul promises, Christians who want to live godly lives will meet resistance, especially by those caught up in a pinball culture who don't hold to any principles but the need or the mood or the fad or the “guiding opinion” of the moment. Resistance can be a good thing! Resistance can crush you, but *resistance that's resisted* can strengthen you and make you stronger ... just ask any weightlifter! Faith is a muscle that must be exercised in the face of resistance; as it is exercised, it gains mass, it gains weight, it grows! In fact, faith is a muscle that *only* grows when exercised; left alone and unused, it atrophies. It is the nature of faith to expand our souls as we exercise it, so if we would gain the good weight, we must exercise faith!

A second way Paul tells Timothy how to gain good weight is by continuing in our sacred tradition. Paul tells Timothy, *“Continue in what you have learned and become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it.”* Timothy grew up on what we call the lap of faith. In the first chapter of this same epistle, Paul wrote to Timothy the faith lived first in Timothy's grandmother Lois, then that same faith lived in your mother, Eunice, and now that faith lives in you, Timothy. In other words, Timothy, you didn't come up with this faith on your own. This faith came to Timothy as an inheritance. Like Timothy, we've all inherited the gift of faith from those who've gone before us. That's what we call a *tradition*. Tradition is not just some conservative “thing” of trying to hang on to an outdated past (*as it is often mis-caricatured*); tradition is a way of deliberately and purposefully living that roots our lives deep into thousands of years of genuine faith. The church has a great weighty tradition we rehearse each Sunday, a tradition that drives and roots our lives deep into thousands of years of faith ... faith that was discovered and exercised and held on to through times of turmoil and war and storm after storm that blew away pretty much everything *but* faith. When we stand to affirm the Apostles' Creed, we are echoing the exact words of apostles, saints, martyrs, scholars, kings, queens, prophets, faithful servants and communities of faith down through history who have already faced everything we could possibly face in our lives and have come through with a substantial, weighty faith that is more than intact! This faith is their great gift to us; all of the Loises and Eunices who have gone before us have given us a faith that now lives in us AND is ours to pass on to generations to come. Living in us is the weighty faith of the Old Testament patriarchs, the prophets, the kings and queens, the persistent widows who banged on doors for justice, the martyrs and apostles and all the communion of saints. That is our inheritance. And we need that inheritance if we are going to survive serious hardship; we need to have a weighty faith to give us the stability necessary to come through the storms of life better, not bitter; larger, not smaller.

This is almost another sermon, but let me make that observation that just going through hard times doesn't necessarily improve the soul. We all know those who've been made bitter, not better, smaller, not larger, through hard times. They don't gain, they lose. They become lighter, not heavier ... some even become repulsive, not attractive. But Jesus Christ can use the hard times to make us better, not bitter, larger, not smaller. And that is what Christian tradition offers ... a time-tested great faith with great ideals that make life weightier, more attractive and eternally significant.

So, Paul says get heavy by (1) faithfully living godly lives in the face of persecution and resistance (2) continuing in our sacred Tradition, and the third way Paul presents for gaining weight is to know the sacred Scriptures. *“All Scripture is God-breathed, inspired by God,”* Paul claims. And the purpose of this inspiration, he writes, is *“... to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”* The Bible is the Word of God that draws us to the weightiest Person who ever existed, Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit uses the words and the stories and the principles of the Bible to give us not only the weight of the communion of saints, but to give us the attractive weight of Jesus Christ Himself. As we read and study these God-breathed words, and seek to align our lives accordingly, we find that Jesus' passions are becoming our passions, His great ideals are becoming our great ideals, His relationship with the Father becomes our relationship to the Father, and His life becomes ours. As we read and study these sacred texts, we begin to gain the life of Jesus, and the weight of God's glory becomes part of our lives.

So, let's get fat! Let's gain weight by living godly lives in the face of persecution and resistance, by taking our place in the great tradition, and by devoting ourselves to knowing the Bible that the Spirit might use it to make us like Christ ... that's how we gain weight. In so doing we are made weighty, substantive ... and so very, very attractive to those who seek significance and meaning in the world about us.