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Speaker: Paul McIlwraith, Teaching Pastor
Scripture: John 14:12—The “Jesus Effect”

Have you heard of “*The Butterfly Effect*”? It is a metaphor for how a small and seemingly insignificant event or gesture can cause a major change in circumstances. In 2004, a movie entitled, “*The Butterfly Effect*” was released starring Ashton Kutcher and the premise for the movie was of a 20 year old college student, who found himself being able to be transported back in time to change some situations in his and his friends’ childhood that would alter their lives in the present. Despite Kutcher’s star power, the movie did not do well, but you have to admit the concept of “*The Butterfly Effect*” is intriguing, isn’t it?

As you ponder your life, can you trace back to some events or circumstances that may not have seemed like such a big deal at the time but upon closer inspection, they changed everything? For me, it was a chance encounter with a classmate in grade 6. Let me explain. Each Friday, my grade 6 teacher would draw names for who would sit together in groups of three for the following week. One particular Friday, my name was drawn to sit with two people I did not know well. I couldn’t even tell who the third person of a trio was, but it was the one that sat next to me that kind of got my attention. We got to know each other a little better the week we sat together and it started a bit of a friendship.

We found out that her grandparents lived on my street so she would sleep over at her grandparent’s house most Fridays and we would hang out a bit together. We grew to be best buddies throughout high school until we reached that fateful decision that we liked each other so much, we started dating. That started a four-year courtship. We were married at the age of 21. We had four children and persevered through the ups and downs of married and family life. This past week, we celebrated our first grandson’s first birthday together, seemingly

all because a grade six teacher drew random seating positions and Carolyn and I were placed together for a week. That is “*The Butterfly Effect*”.

This got me thinking of the message series that we have been in at North Park over the past several weeks, entitled, *On The Way*. Remember, throughout this series we have gone back and forth between some of Jesus’ more intentional teachings in the gospels. Times where he seemed to gather people together to do a little more structured teaching and those times that appear to be a little more spontaneous. Times where in the midst of the routine day to day activity, something came up and Jesus used it as a teachable moment.

I have been thinking about these teachings of Jesus, intentional or spontaneous and how they have impacted many of our lives. In fact, for most, Jesus has changed the course of your entire life. He has taken you from a living a life only for yourself, your own needs and desires and given you a greater purpose. One chance encounter with Jesus changed everything for you. Talk about “*The Butterfly Effect*”!

That is what we have been hearing from those being baptized this weekend. The life and teachings of Jesus have had a rippled effect in their lives. Their faith in him has grown to impact every area. Perhaps it should be known as, “*The Jesus Effect*”?

I thought that because it is baptism weekend, I would do something just a little different today. As I said, throughout this series, we have looked at the intentional and the more spontaneous teachings of Jesus but you may have notice that they all have involved Jesus speaking. Doing his teaching verbally.

Have you ever pondered the number of times that Jesus actually taught by example in the gospels? Times that he didn't lead with his words but with his actions. It was his example that spoke loud and clear and impacted lives around him. Just take a moment to ponder your own life. Can you think of someone who had a profound impact on you not necessary because of what they said but, because of what they did? I can think of several examples in my own life. Carolyn, first and foremost who has demonstrated selfless love, support and encouragement through her actions towards me. There have been times, believe it or not that I don't warrant or deserve her love but she has been there just the same. My parents' lives were also examples of faith, love and service.

There are others for sure, like my children, teachers, coaches and coworkers but do you know one example that is still etched in my mind? It almost seems silly. It was a golf game with my best friend and his father in law, Joe twenty-five years ago. One golf game. The first and only golf game I ever played with Joe but I can remember it like it was yesterday. Joe was an average, not great golfer but it wasn't his score or anything he said or we talked about that day that made such an impression on me. It was how he played the game. You know that old adage, *it is not whether you win or lose but how you play the game that really counts*. I guess the older I get the more I believe that.

Any golfers here today? I don't know your experience but golf is a game that just lends itself to cheating doesn't it? You flub a drive and it dribbles 20 yards down the fairway, what do you do? You take a mulligan, a do over. You hit it again. The first one doesn't count. You find yourself under a tree, you use the shoe wedge, your foot to kick it out to a better position. You are putting on the green and come within 3-4 feet of the hole, you generally pick up your ball and count it as in, right? It's a gimme.

Does this just describe my game or is this the way everyone plays? Now I am a competitive person and on this day I was playing with my best friend since we were kids, so of course, we are in a competition to see who will win and if that means cutting a few corners, so be it.

But as my buddy and I are locked in this cut throat competition, I began to take notice of Joe's game. It didn't matter the shot he hit or where he hit it, he would walk up to the ball where it was and hit the next shot. He didn't move it around to get a better position. When he was on the green and putting and he was close to the hole, we would say, *that's okay, Joe. Pick it up, it is a gimme*. Not Joe, he would putt everything into the hole.

I actually began to count his strokes on the holes just to see if he would fudge it a little bit but guess what? If Joe got a six, he would say, *six*. Not five like maybe I would have done at the time. He played the game with such integrity and honesty which may seem so silly because I mean, it's only golf not anything that really matters but that taught me such a valuable lesson. If you can be trusted in the small things, you can be trusted in the bigger things. Joe's example of how he played golf, challenged me in not just the way I golfed but the way that I handle myself in every area of my life.

That one golf game with Joe had a "The Butterfly Effect", because although he has since passed away, his example often comes to mind when I face issues of honesty and integrity in my own life today.

Can you think of those examples in your life? Have you considered that Jesus didn't just instruct his followers with what he said, *On the way*, but like Joe, it was also what he did? The way that he lived. In fact, in the gospel of John, Jesus calls those who believe in him to actually do what he does, to follow his example.

John 14:12

"I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father.

Do you remember what Jesus' invitation was to disciples when he first met each of them?

Matthew 4:19

"Come, follow me,

He wasn't thinking, hey to the nearest university or college classroom because I want to fill your head with a bunch of head knowledge.

No, he was calling them into an apprenticeship. Where they would actually follow in his footsteps and do what he did. His call was to follow his example and that is the same call he has for our lives as well. To live according to his teachings, yes. To speak about him and preach about the values of the Kingdom of God. For sure, but to also live like he did. To be “Christ like” in the way that we act.

There is a familiar saying in Christian circles,

Preach the Gospel at all times. If necessary, use words.

We often wrongly attribute this quote to St Francis of Assisi. It was probably not him who said it and we can use this quote to mean all sorts of things it probably doesn't mean, but I think the nuance of it gets to the idea I want to highlight.

Our faith walk with Jesus doesn't mean that we just talk about it. It also means and maybe this one is more important, living your life like Jesus is your role model, your mentor and King. Living so that people can actually look at the way you act and say, *ahh, Jesus, right?*

Let's take a few minutes and go to scripture today and look at a few of these examples of the way that Jesus acted. Remember, today we are not focusing on the things Jesus said but on what he did. The way that he lived.

The first thing that Jesus did:

1. He engaged with people.

You may be thinking, *well duh, Paul*, of course he engaged people. That was the call on his life. He came to save humanity. How could he do that without engaging with us and being with us? How could he do that without getting to know us? It would be like someone wanting to be a pilot but they were afraid of heights. It's kind of a deal breaker. Jesus was in the people business so you would hope that he would be out and about engaging with people and he was.

In fact, as I was preparing this message this week, I decided to reread all of the gospels to get a sense of what he did and I was amazed. When you read it all

at once you realize just how active Jesus was. He was always coming and going and moving around the countryside, meeting with people. I was exhausted just reading it.

Mark 5:21

Jesus got into the boat again and went back to the other side of the lake, where a large crowd gathered around him on the shore.

Mark 6:6

Then Jesus went from village to village,

On and on it goes. He went by land and he went by boat. He went in good weather and when conditions were stormy. He met with men and women and children. He met with friends and enemies, kin folk and those who were ethnically different. He met with the healthy and the sick and the rich and the poor. He connected with the powerful and the powerless and the pious and the depraved.

Jesus shook more hands and kissed more babies than a politician up for reelection but to him, there was no ulterior motive. He was not looking to get something from them. He engaged with people because he genuinely loved them. At one point in the gospel of John, Jesus tells those around him that they should:

John 13:34

Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other.

Love was the catalyst for the way that Jesus engaged and embraced people from every walk of life. He loved people. Have you ever met someone that just seemed to love people? You can tell instantaneously, can't you? When they engage with you, they are present. They are right there with you, not distracted. They look you in the eye. They listen well. They are empathetic. They make you feel like you are the only one in the room.

Do you know people like this? Perhaps you are one of those people to others, so loving and hospitable.

When Carolyn and I were young married students at Western, we attended Wortley Baptist Church here in London. Some of you are familiar with Wortley. Through our involvement there, we got introduced to Perry and Louise Zavitz and their children, Janine

and Mike and we developed a warm friendship. Son, Mike attends North Park today.

Louise, or Louie as she was affectionately known, was one of the most loving people I have ever met. She kind of took Carolyn and I under her wing. We were newly married and away from our families. She had such a servant's heart and was hospitable and what a cook! I can't tell you how many meals I enjoyed around the Zavitz dining room table. When you were in Louie's presence you felt cherished by her.

She laughed with us and cried with us and genuinely took an interest in our lives. From the world's perspective, there was nothing that really distinguished her life. She was a devoted housewife and mother but she followed Jesus and his love flowed from her by the way she loved and engaged people like he did. Have you had the privilege of meeting people like this?

On the other end of the spectrum, have you ever met a person that was in the people business and you wonder, why? Their actions, body language and words give off the impression that not only did they not love people, they didn't seem to like them much either?

A few weeks ago, I had an encounter with someone who's very job was people. They were in the people business. They spent all of their working hours engaging with people and the impression I got from the way they interacted with me? You're in the wrong business! I felt like I was a distraction and an interruption to his day.

Now, I think I am a pretty understanding that perhaps this person was just having a bad day. I should give them the benefit of the doubt. Unfortunately, this is not the first encounter I have had with this person and it is the same way, each time and I feel sorry for him. It must be difficult to be in the people business and not love people.

Do you know North Park Church, we are in the people business? Why? It is because the one that we follow is in the people business. He engaged with people because he loved them. Do we love people? Really? Not just lip service but with our actions? Do we make people feel loved and cherished?

Look at the ways that Jesus demonstrated his love to people, not but what he said, remember we are staying away from his words in this message, but by what he did.

Matthew 14:14

Jesus saw the huge crowd as he stepped from the boat, and he had compassion on them. He had compassion on them.

My observation is that more and more in our culture today, we are suffering from EDD. Not ADD, EDD, Empathy Deficit Disorder. We seemed to be losing our compassion for people and their circumstances. In our world of technology, it is becoming harder and harder to step outside of ourselves and tune into what other people may be experiencing, especially those who feel, think and believe differently than we do.

As a result, we are seeing a rise in personal conflicts, communication breakdowns and even hatred towards groups of people different than ourselves. Empathy is different than sympathy. Sympathy reflects an understanding of another person's situation but viewed through your own perspective. *I sympathize with the problems you are having with your children because you should see what I am going through with mine, let me tell you about it.* A narcissist can be sympathetic in this way.

Empathy is what you feel when you can step outside yourself and enter the world of the other person. Jesus' love for people was demonstrated by the way he felt compassionate or empathy for them. The way he tried to see the world from their perspective.

So let me ask you, are you a compassionate person? What is it that stirs compassion or empathy in you? Look what it was for Jesus,

Mark 1:40-41

A man with leprosy came and knelt in front of Jesus, begging to be healed. "If you are willing, you can heal me and make me clean," he said. Moved with compassion, Jesus reached out and touched him.

Jesus was compassionate towards those who were sick, alienated and alone. Just like those with leprosy in his day.

In the gospel of John chapter 11, Jesus himself displays grief upon the death of his friend, Lazarus. It says that he was deeply moved in spirit when he saw the way that others grieved the death of Lazarus, that he himself wept. Jesus was compassionate towards those who grieved.

Mark 6:34

Jesus saw the huge crowd as he stepped from the boat, and he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

Jesus had compassion on those who were lost.

Mark 8:2

Jesus says to his disciples, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat."

Jesus had compassion on those who were in need. Those who were hungry.

So let's recap. Jesus had compassion on those who were sick, alienated, lonely, grieving, hungry and lost and in each of those circumstances he didn't just speak words to them, teach them or pray for them. No, he acted. He healed, comforted and was present with them. He fed them and led them. He saved them. Jesus engaged with people often. He was in the people business. He genuinely loved them and that was demonstrated by his compassion and practical gestures to offer help and support to them in their need. I wonder if the same thing can be said about us. Not just that we say we loved people but we demonstrate with our actions and our compassion. So, one way that Jesus acted was that he engaged people. A second way:

2. He disengaged from people.

He engaged and loved people but he also disengaged from people from time to time.

Luke 9:18

One day Jesus left the crowds to pray alone.

Mark 1:35

Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray.

Let me tell you that these are some of the most comforting words for me personally, in all of the

New Testament. Let me explain for those of you who don't know me well. I am an introvert. If you're into Myers Briggs Personality assessments, I am an ISFJ.

It may be hard to believe given what I do in here most weekends. I preach before a large group of people but I can do this and love it and feel energized in the moment but when I get home on Sunday afternoons, I crash. I need alone time to recharge.

I am in the Jesus business which means I am in the people business and I love people. I love greeting you before and after the services and meeting with you in my office or coffee shop. I love serving with you and hearing your stories.

But, I also need times of solitude and quiet. Time to come before God to recharge and reenergize. In the past, I used to feel guilty about that. Why?

I had this picture of Jesus constantly coming and going so I better be like him. I need to be accepting every dinner invitation. Fill my day timer with meetings. Join every committee. Be at every church event. Volunteer and serving whenever asked. Go. Go. Go.

It makes me tired just thinking about it but passages like Luke 9:18 and Mark 1:35 give me and others like me, hope. Jesus got alone. He went to isolated places. He loved being away from people sometimes. He put some boundaries around his day so that he incorporated needed time of solitude, peace and contemplation before his heavenly Father.

This past Tuesday, I had one of those days where I was in meetings most of the day. I dread those days and find them so exhausting and honestly, I wake up on days like that and think, *if I can just get through it.*

It is on those days that if I have any free time at all, I just go into my office and close the door. The staff knows and don't take any offense to it. I just need to disengage from people and recharge.

Maybe you can relate to that and maybe you can't. I had a guy say to me once, *Paul, if I finish work and know that I am going home to an empty house, I can't do it. I have to go to a coffee shop until I know someone is home.* I just looked at him like he was some sort of an alien being.

His struggle is opposite to mine. He needs people around him. He feeds off them for energy and can't as easily manage time alone. I am just the opposite and now I know that is okay.

Through his actions, Jesus demonstrates the importance of engaging with people AND disengaging from people and spending time alone before his heavenly Father.

So, let me ask you. How well do you do with disengaging from people? How well do you do disengaging from our hectic, fast paced world?

That means unplugging and putting aside the phone and the iPad. That means no distractions or interruptions and simply being in the presence of God? From what it says in the gospels, we can probably presume that Jesus did this everyday.

It was part of his daily rhythm and that is what allowed him to be so present and attentive in those times when he was with people. It is what helped him be so empathetic and compassionate to their needs and concerns.

Matthew 14:13 it says when Jesus heard of the death of his friend, John the Baptist, *he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place to process before God.*

It was in those times alone that he was able to process his own thoughts and feelings and lay the burdens of others before God. Then he could go out and be truly present with people in their circumstances.

Last weekend in the foyer between services as I was engaging many of you in small talk, I had a woman stop me and say, *you know Paul, you carry a lot of burdens.* I kind of laughed it off at the time but that comment has stirred me this week. I guess given my line of work, myself and the other pastors, we hear and see a lot and we can hold on to them.

Admittedly, there are times when I really felt the weight of those things. That is why more and more, I make it a regular daily routine to do as Jesus did. To disengage and get alone. Go to isolated place just to be still, ready my heart and come before God. For me, the best time to do that is early morning. I usually get up around 5:00 am. I have a favourite chair in the living room and I settle in and take some time with God before anyone else is up. I also arrive in the office early to just have some quiet

alone focused work time before the busyness of people begins. Do you feel so overwhelmed because it feels like you are carrying the burdens of so many people around you? You want to be like Jesus and engage people and love people and spend time with them but it is becoming all so exhausting and causing you anxiety and stress. I have some good news for you.

Jesus also disengaged from people. He put up some boundaries around his day timer so that he could ensure that he had alone time with himself and with God to replenish and rejuvenate his heart.

I know what you are thinking, *but Paul, I have no margin in my life. Where am I going to find the time for myself? I am running myself ragged already. Everyone needs me.* At this season of your life, it may seem like everyone needs you but they need you healthy, body soul, mind and spirit. A regular daily time to disengage from people and the world, to get alone with God may be the best investment that you ever make. It will allow you to be more present and helpful to those that God does bring your way just as it did for Jesus. Our time is passing and there are so many other actions of Jesus that teach us how to live but let me just highlight one final one today.

Jesus engaged with people and he disengaged with people to ensure his heart was focused on God and his call on his life which was ultimately to; Give his life for people. That is the third action.

3. Jesus gave his life for people.

John 15:13

There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends. That is exactly what Jesus did. He gave his life for you, for me, for us.

It was the greatest act of sacrifice and selflessness the world has ever known. Oh, there have been others who throughout history have made noteworthy, even heroic, sacrifices in laying down their lives. People such as the Apostle Paul, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Jim Elliot.

But only one individual was perfect, sinless and completely innocent, and yet willingly gave His life for the greatest cause of all—he died so that we could live! Jesus, the son of God gave his life for the sins of the world.

Romans 5:8

But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.

No one else could die for such a cause—to make forgiveness of sin, freedom from sin and reconciliation to God possible for all humanity. It was, and will always be, the greatest sacrifice ever made.

We know today that this action, Jesus' death and resurrection, changed the course of human history. It changed everything but at the time of Jesus death around 33AD, it was little more than a footnote, *rebellious, charismatic religious leader dies on a cross*. This could have described dozens of people in this day. The Romans crucified a lot of these types of people in the 1st century. As we know now, Jesus was not just anyone.

Remember the “The Butterfly Effect”? A small and seemingly insignificant event or gesture can cause a major change in circumstances.

At the time of Jesus' death:

33 AD There were about 120 followers of Jesus

Just after Pentecost, within two or three months of Jesus' death there were over 8 000 followers of Jesus

After the missionary trips of the Apostle Paul and others, there were around 20 000 followers of Jesus, Christians as they were now called.

By 358 AD there were 31.7 million Christians worldwide.

By 1200 AD, the Bible is available in 22 languages

By 1900 AD, there were 558 million Christians around the globe

Today, there are over 2.2 billion Christians in the world

Part or all of the Bible have been translated into 2479 languages or dialects and it sells over 100 million copies annually. Year after year after year.

As Christians, we are part of the most amazing story of blessing that the world has ever known. Launched by God at the beginning of creation and truly set in motion by the actions of His son, Jesus. His life, death and resurrection.

Long before “The Butterfly Effect”, there was the “Jesus Effect” and we are invited to be a part of it. To follow not just what Jesus said but also what he did. He engaged people with love and compassion and so should we. He disengaged from people regularly to focus on his heavenly Father and so should we. He gave his life for people and that is his call on our lives. For those who choose to follow him it says in,

1 John 3:16

We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters.

Actions speak louder than words. What does it mean for us to give up our lives for one another? It means to live and love like Jesus. Although that may not mean physically dying for each other, it does mean living compassionately, selflessly, with humility and generously with those God brings into our life.

Let's call it “The Jesus Effect”.

A small and seemingly insignificant event or gesture can cause a major change in circumstances. The way that we live could change another person's life completely. When we live our lives not only following what Jesus said but also what he did, who knows? God may use your act of love and kindness done in faith to impact someone else. To lead them into a life of following the one who gave us his all, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Amen? Amen.

Let's Pray

Points to Ponder

On The Way ~ The “Jesus Effect”

John 14:12

With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.

1. The “Butterfly Effect” is a metaphor for how a small and seemingly insignificant event or gesture can cause a major change in a circumstance. Share an example of a “Butterfly Effect” in your life.
2. Is there someone in your life that has positively impacted you not by their words but by their actions? What was it about their life that was so impactful to you?
3. How do you engage people in your life? Are you better in crowds or in smaller “one to one” interactions? As you think back over your week, talk about some of the meaningful interactions you have had with people. What was it that made them so significant?
4. Are you a compassionate person? What is it that stirs compassion in you?
5. Are you someone who gets energized by being alone or with people? Do you make it a regular routine in your life to disengage from people to spend time alone with God? What does that look like for you?
6. Jesus gave his life for people. Think back to the time when you first encountered Jesus in a meaningful way. How has the life, death and resurrection of Jesus changed the way that you live? How has it caused you to live?
7. What would it mean for you to “give up your life” for others in the name of Jesus?

Prayer and Action Item

Pray for one another out of the key points that were discussed. Invite Jesus to challenge you in the way that you engage with people, disengage with people and give up your life for others as a way of following his example.