

Unsettled

I never liked the first day of school as a kid. Can anybody relate to that? But, for me the issue wasn't school so much. It was the people I encountered – they were the problem. I was not one of the popular kids. In fact, I was one of those kids that the popular kids enjoyed picking on. Now, I wasn't because I looked funny, or wore the wrong clothes, or had really thick glasses. I just had the wrong the last name.

I was born in the Netherlands, and my given name was Pieter Kok. So, you can imagine perhaps the first day of school for me was not fun. The teacher would read down the list of names and she would hesitate and carefully try and pronounce the name. “Peter Cock”??? Then the giggles and eventually the chasing the little Dutch boy home with rocks.

Like a lot of kids I grew up with a bit of a battered soul. I wasn't abused or beaten. My parents were loving and caring – did their best to raise us 5 kids. I changed my name when I got married to Pieter Van Waarde – Van Waarde being a shortened form of my mom's maiden name. The name change reflected a change in my life's direction. I had spent many years trying to compensate for some things that got broken early on – but I am getting a little ahead of myself.

Today, I want to take you on a bit of a personal journey. This is not a typical sermon per-say. My main objective is not so much to teach, but to provoke. I want to invite you to look at your own wounds and your own places of unsettledness.

I have come to believe that all change – real change – begins with a feeling of unsettledness. I think we all know what it feels like. It is that sensation that *something* is just not right and you can't shake it. You can try to ignore it. You can try to work over it. You can even attempt to numb it out by drinking and/or using. But it won't go away. It is like a bad headache. The feeling of unsettledness is a real problem, and eventually the pain and irritation of it forces us to do something.

Unfortunately, I don't think we humans are very good at interpreting or processing this feeling. Often our instinctive response is to think that the unsettledness is caused by something that needs to change in our external world. We think, “I am uneasy and off-balance because my job isn't really satisfying... My spouse is getting irritating... My car needs to be upgraded... I need a vacation” – even though I just got back from a vacation! We feel unsettled and in trying to process that feeling and “make it go away” we look at the things happening out here and assume that something has to change out here. We need a new job... a new spouse... a new car... a better vacation... But, I have come to believe that the feeling of unsettledness (at the core) is more-often-than-not soul related. It is a soul cry.

The feeling of unsettledness is a gift from God.

That sensation of unsettledness is the urging of God inside us to take another look at what is really happening in our life (on a soul level). I still remember the first time that became clear to me. I was sitting on a yellow ragged couch in my one bedroom apartment. The stench of spilled bong juice filled the air. Half-empty beer cans were leaking around the trash can in the corner of the room. It was 2:00 am and I was sitting on the couch with my best friend Chuck and we were surveying the mess.

It was supposed to have been a small get-together, but word got out that there was a party at my place. Lots of people came – many I didn't know. Apparently they had fun; the trashed apartment was evidence of that. I don't remember much of the evening myself. I had partaken in some strange mixture of microdot, hash, and beer – and my brain was very much in a fog. All I could think about was how long it would take to clean up the mess, and how much of the security deposit the repairs would confiscate.

It hurt to think.

In the midst of my stupor, Chuck (the lone remaining partier) said, “Hey Piet, we are always going to live like this!” He was excited about that idea. For the first time in years, I was not. I wasn't sure what was at the root of it, but, the fact was, I was very unsettled – and I wanted out. And this was unusual, because my typical pattern was to just shake it off and assume it was a bad plan. Maybe I shouldn't have had it at my place. Maybe I should find neater friends. Maybe not so much beer the next time around. That would have been my typical response. The problem is “out here”...

But, Chuck's words haunted me, “We're always going to live like *this*.” Like THIS... And I can't fully explain what shifted inside, but in the days that followed the party, I realized the “THIS” that Chuck spoke of *was* the problem. There was something inside that no longer wanted *this*! My soul was longing – and begging really – for something different and better.

That experience on a yellow-ragged couch taught me a very important lesson. The lesson was that my soul has needs – and ignoring the needs of the soul is very much like ignoring any other kind of need. There are real consequences. If I don't eat I will get hungry. I will have physical sensations that remind me that it is time to eat.

The soul has needs and the feeling of unsettledness is one of the ways that the soul reminds us that we have not been paying attention to what it needs. But, because we are not always well equipped or well-versed in matters of the soul we make a lot of mistakes trying to figure out what's wrong. It took me about four years to realize what was happening inside me – it

culminated with that night on the yellow ragged couch. Now, I had other signals along the way. But,.. I misinterpreted them. I just thought it was a bad party. Not enough beer. Wrong people. I didn't realize that my soul was crying out for a better life. But, when I realized that that was what was going on – then I could change. God brought life to my soul and I changed.

Now, that was my first “big” encounter with soul hunger. It was certainly not my last. Over the years, I found myself on many couches at many times in my life where I discovered that what I really needed was to give renewed attention to my soul. I learned that sometimes I even need to re-visit the same things over and over again.

For example, when do you think people wrestle with the biggest and greatest doubts? Instinctively, I thought that doubt was the main issue early on in a person's journey. In other words, I just figured that when people are trying to sort out whether or not they want God to be a part of their life and whether or not the “Christian approach” is the way to get there, I just assumed that those were the times that doubt plays the greatest part. How do we know God is real? Does he even exist? Is Jesus really the only way? You are familiar with these questions. But, here is what I have discovered – and see if this doesn't resonate with you...

When a person is coming to Christ and considering the matter of putting faith in him (especially if they are coming as an adult), they are often coming with some measure of pain. Perhaps even a measure of desperation. Things are not working in their life – and 9-10 times that's what gets a person through the doors of a church. Now, when you are desperate all you care about is relief. You need a fresh start. The message of forgiveness/grace is like cold refreshing water to a parched and shriveled soul. You have questions – sure – but more than anything you are hungry for love and peace. You are hungry for a new beginning. By grace, God offers that to you.

What a deal! Hard to turn that down...

Now, let's wind the clock forward a bit. Because of grace and the working of God's Spirit in your life things start turning around. You get sober. You get a handle on your finances. Your relationships improve. All of this starts having a positive net effect on other parts of your life. You secure a job. You get promoted. You get out of debt. You become more productive.

Then you find yourself on another – maybe not so ragged couch – but you are unsettled because you have just heard that a dear friend passed away from cancer. They were way too young. You prayed for them. Nothing happened. This isn't the first time you have had to face the frustration of unanswered prayer. This seems to happen way more often than you thought. Where is God when you really need him? He was there before – but where is he now?

It is very unsettling! What will you do with that?

You can ignore it. You can pretend it doesn't bother you. You can give up and go back to the old life. Or, you can stop and pay attention to what your soul is trying to tell you! And what is your soul asking for in times like this? My contention is that your soul is longing to go deeper – both intellectually and experientially.

The thing is that when you start your journey you need just a few things to make the shift to grace. You have nothing to offer God – except your messy life. But, once things are starting to come together, you have more to lose. You start thinking you may know better than God. It's easier to think you can coast and get away with it – and sometimes you can – until you get the pink slip, or until you get the divorce papers, or the foreclosure notice or the call that your best friend just died. Then you realize you don't have enough internal substance to persevere with your faith intact, because there isn't enough internal substance to hold the weight of what you're really living with. Jesus talked about it this way, he said,

Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse because it is built on bedrock. But anyone who hears my teaching and doesn't obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash.

Matthew 7:24-27

The whole theme of this passage has to do with orienting your entire life – in ever increasing ways around the teachings of Jesus – before you think you need it. That's the trick. That's the challenge. And, candidly that is why we work so hard at creating so many different environments AND urging your participation. Because we recognize that it is not always readily apparent that you will need it one day. Many of us around here know what it feels like to be stuck on this couch with doubts plaguing your soul. So, we invite you to the deeper places beyond the weekends – so you will have what you need when your soul is crying out for more.

Now, there is one final point of unsettledness I'd like to talk about – there are actually eleven seasons described in the book. But, this next season I want to talk about has something to do with our journey in the context of community.

Most of the time when we talk about relating to God we think of a personal journey, but Jesus said there are two great commandments. The first is about our devotion to God, the other is about our devotion to one another. And I think anyone of us who has been around this journey

for any length of time know the complexities of this whole “one-another” piece. Talk about that which makes us unsettled!

How many of us have found ourselves fretting about our engagement in the life of the church? And the reason we become unsettling is because many of us can remember a day when it was different and better. We have memories of a time where church was great. We loved coming. We loved the people. It was so fresh and new and helpful. But, then something changes.

The music is louder somehow – and irritating at a whole new level. We become convinced that the messages just don’t include enough Bible verses. The phone calls/e-mails aren’t being returned as quickly as one would hope. And it just doesn’t *feel* the same. You are not being fed anymore. Maybe it’s time to find another church. Maybe it is. But, maybe the issue isn’t about changing the environment – maybe its your soul saying its time to grow up in some new way.

One of the most important lessons of our experience in community is that there is a significant transition that takes place at some point in the journey (with community). Early on in our community adventure it is all about what the church provides for you. The community exists for your benefit. But, then as our soul grows and matures the soul realizes that there must be an outlet for all this good that has been invested. Soul evolution is not just about what we receive but it is about what we give.

In other words, as we find ourselves longing for something more – and wishing someone could give it to us – I have to come to the conclusion that what we are really longing for is a place to give. There is a necessary transition where the greatest growth we experience is not so much about what the community gives to you – but what you bring to the community.

I am fairly confident that this church isn’t all that much different from our church. I think I know Rick (and the way this team operates) to know that there are more dreams cooking on the stove than there are people in place to help serve them up. Is it possible that some of what God has been up to in this last season is that there are initiatives and opportunities for impact that have your name on it? Very excited stuff!

In fact, maybe the whole reason you’re here today is because God is trying to give you some resolution to that unsettled feeling inside (that you have been carrying around inside that has very little to do with something God is going to give to you – but rather, something God is going to call you into! And it isn’t just about helping the church get something done that “it” needs done – it is the very thing your own soul needs to evolve.

May I be so bold as to invite you not to fight it off? It is not too late. God will let you love lately.....