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Pastor:
Rev. Dr. William C. Weaver
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Sunday, February 28, 2010

Sermon Texts: Genesis 15: 1-12, 17-18
Luke 13: 31-35
Philippians 3:17 – 4:1

Sermon Title: "Messies Anonymous"

Sermon Topic: Christ's dwelling in our lives

Sermon Purpose: To teach that God is not concerned about people's messy house, but their messy lives. God sent Jesus to help us clean up our lives and "get right with God."

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Sermon Prayer: God of life and God of love, Creator and Sustainer; send your Holy Spirit upon us to guide our understanding of your Word and your Will for us. In Jesus' precious name, we pray. Amen.

Mary couldn't get her leaky faucet fixed because she was ashamed to let a plumber see the inside of her cluttered home. Jane was pregnant and didn't know where she would put her new baby because she had so much "stuff" piled in every room of her apartment. Lorene's house was so messy she couldn't bring her terminally ill husband home from the hospital to be put on a home-care hospice, so he could "die with dignity." These people (whose names have been changed to protect the sloppy) and thousands more have been aided by a self-help group appropriately named Messies Anonymous (M.A.).

Sandra Felton, a Florida high school teacher, founded M. A. in 1982 because she understood the pain of people who just couldn't get organized no matter how hard they tried. She suffered from the same problem. Sandra decided she could no longer live with the mess in her home. She tried reading books on being neat and systematized at home, but they didn't help because, as she says, "They were written by organized people."

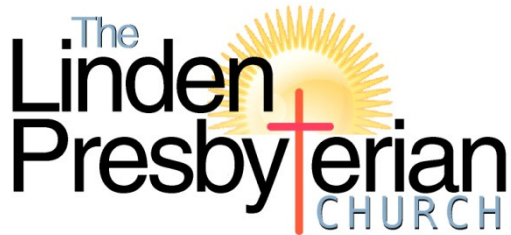
Ms. Felton put an announcement in the local paper stating that she would hold a meeting for other messy people who couldn't cope. Eleven women and one man came. A local newspaper story about that first M. A. meeting received national attention and Ms. Felton soon received 12,000 letters. She responded to all the mail, published a newsletter, and hired a computer consultant.

Currently there are at least 18 Messies Anonymous groups around the country with more than 7,000 members. There are even several chapters in Australia! Anyone wanting to start one can contact Sandra Felton for information and support by Googling Messies Anonymous on the Internet. She keeps the information simple so as not to overburden the already disorganized person. A newsletter is available; dues are \$10 per year.¹

Do you know any likely candidates for Messies Anonymous? (I could be considered a candidate. Have you seen my desk, lately – either here or at home?) However, the Apostle Paul is not

¹ Sandra Farrell Bazrod, Los Angeles *Times*.





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writing about people who keep messy **houses**, but people who keep messy **lives**. Their lives are messy because they've never made a basic choice about whom they will worship. Paul writes of those whose "god is their belly." Now, he's not talking about those of us who may be a little overweight. He's talking about people who live only for today and its pleasures with no thought of eternity. He's talking about the cult of instant gratification – whether it's food, or sex, or drink, or drugs or raw materialism. He's talking about the people whose eyes are on short-term profits rather than long-term investments. In short, he's writing about people not very different from you and me.

It's true, isn't it? Many of us are part of that number. We have settled for the easy road, the broad gate.

A researcher for a publishing company was interviewing a number of people to determine what kind of books they liked to read. The Bible, Shakespeare, and the classics were high on nearly everyone's list.

In return for their cooperation, the researcher offered each person a choice of a free book from a list of titles published by the company. The most popular choice of this supposedly high-minded group was "Murder of a Burlesque Queen."²

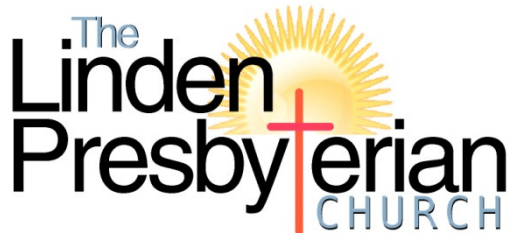
Tell me I'm wrong. I hope I am. But as I analyze our culture today – even that part of our culture within the church – it seems clear we prize comfort more than commitment, self-indulgence more than self-sacrifice, and possessions more than people. And the sad thing is that many of us don't even realize that our values are askew.

Paul says there are two kinds of people: those who have their eyes on this world and its pleasures and those whose eyes are on heaven.

In contrast to those whose god is their belly, Paul writes: "But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ ... Therefore, my brethren, ... stand firm thus in the Lord ..." (NSV)

It's a matter of basic orientation. Are you a person whose life is oriented toward this world, or is your life oriented **beyond** this world to eternity? This is not to say that we're to turn our back on this world. Paul isn't encouraging us to move to a monastery and to take a vow of poverty. But the question still exists: do our values reflect a higher order of things – a divine order – a heavenly order?

We don't talk about heaven anymore, do we? Even in the church we don't talk about heaven as we once did. In his book, *The Problem of Pain*, C. S. Lewis expressed our dilemma like this: "We are very shy nowadays of even mentioning heaven. We are afraid of the jeer about "pie in the sky" and of being told that we are trying to 'escape from the duty of making a happy world here-and-now into dreams of a happy world elsewhere.' But either there is 'pie in the sky' or there is not," Lewis continues. "If there is not, then Christianity is false, for this doctrine is woven into its whole fabric. If there is, then this truth, like any other, must be faced, whether it is useful at political meetings or not."



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Lewis is right, of course. Either our primary focus is on this world and its pleasures or it is on heaven. We'd like to have it both ways but we can't. There's a choice that must be made. Let me give you a little quiz this morning – a quiz to see if you're oriented toward earth or toward heaven.

First of all, are you able to enjoy the simple pleasures of life, or must you surround yourself with toys?

David and his brother, Michael, were complete opposites. Michael was a successful businessman, while David took seasonal jobs at dude ranches, parks and resorts. Concerned for David's welfare, businessman Michael tried to entice David with the so-called "Good Life." He would send David photos labeled "My new sound system" or "My new car." The campaign ended, though, when Michael received a poster from David showing a breathtaking view of Wyoming's Grand Teton National Park. On the back David had written: "My back yard."³

I worry about those of us who can't enjoy life unless we have the latest toy, or we're engaging in the latest fad. Whether it's a sleek sports car or a message at the neighborhood spa, there are some people who are desperately seeking happiness through sensual pleasure. There's nothing wrong with that as long as we recognize that it is an illusion. It's an escape. It's a substitute for real happiness – the happiness of an experience of the indwelling Christ. There are many of us who won't be able to old age, much less heaven. Our world is wrapped up in the pursuit of power, pleasure, and possessions. We can only enjoy a sunset if it's in Aruba. Exercise has no lure unless we are in the right club or at least have on the right attire. Even the food we eat must be served with the proper ambience. I'm not saying these things are sinful. I am saying if you **have** to have these things to be happy, you're in trouble. Can you enjoy the simple pleasures of life; or must you have more?

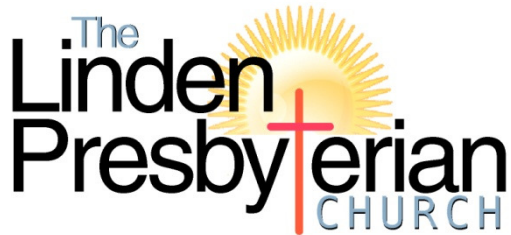
Dr. Eugene Brice once read an account written by a woman born near the turn of the century. She wrote of raising a family on a farm during hard, hard times. She told about one terrible winter when their 18-month-old daughter came down with a cold, then the flu, then pneumonia, then diphtheria. Living 18 miles from town, they resorted to home remedies and the help of neighbors. The baby's condition, though, went downhill rapidly and they grew more desperate. The worst night, the woman wrote, was when snow fell, making anymore travel to town extremely difficult. That night the baby lay virtually lifeless. The baby's father wrote in his journal: "Heavy snow. How can we bury our baby in this? The blackest day of my life thus far."

The next day the doctor came out from town, making the last 8 miles of the trip on horseback over terrible roads. He said that the infection seemed to be lessened, but that the child was still very near death. If they could just get some nourishment of some kind down her, with a bit of strength and a lot of luck, she might make it. Maybe, he said, an egg would help.

An egg! Simple suggestion, but it was the dead of winter and the hens were not laying and there was no way to get to town. Someone went to the recently installed rural party line and rang the neighbors. The word went out quickly. Did anyone have an egg? The baby's life depended on it. Fortunately, one distant neighbor did! One egg was found, and the neighbor rode over with it. Into

³ Nancy Vitavec, "Life in These United States," *Reader's Digest*, February 1994, p. 65.





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the house he came as they rejoiced. The baby was given eggnog of sorts, and continued her improvement. The crisis was over, and the baby was soon well again.

The woman who wrote that account of life on an East Texas farm was Eugene Brice's mother; the baby was her twin sister. Brice says he thinks of this occasionally when he opens the refrigerator door and sees eggs stacked there in every season of the year. He often compares his life, all that he has, with theirs in those far off more difficult days when, in comparison to us, they had so little. And yet, he occasionally wonders if in his entire life he has ever felt the depth of joy they felt when that one egg was brought carefully into the house on that snowy December day in 1932. "A person's life," Jesus said, "does not consist of the abundance of his possessions." Are you able to appreciate the simple pleasures of life?

And one more question: **Are you seeking, by the grace of God, to live a Christ-like life?** There's no use talking about the eternal joy of life on the other side of the tomb if you don't really enjoy living for Christ on this side of the tomb. Are you and I joyfully living as followers of Jesus here and now?

John Haggai tells about two men who were contemporaries. The first, Clifford Baron, was one of the greatest orators America has ever seen. One respected pastor called him, "the greatest preacher since the apostle Paul." Audiences everywhere were spellbound by his messages. At age 25 Clifford Baron had touched more lives, influenced more leaders, and set more audience records than any clergyman his age in American history.

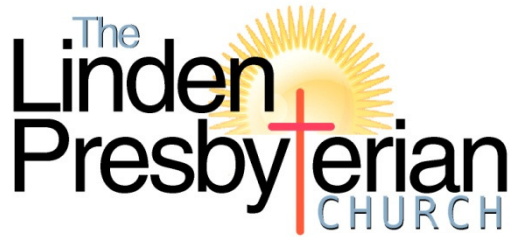
The other man was Dawson Trotman. Trotman was bright, artistic, and highly articulate. He was a man who loved a challenge. At age 27, with only one year of seminary and one year of Bible school behind him, Trotman set up the Navigators, an evangelistic organization that stresses total commitment to Christ. Trotman wasn't without his detractors. He suffered vicious verbal attacks but carried on anyway, fully believing the promise: "Great peace have those who love your law, and nothing causes them to stumble."

Both Baron and Trotman died before their time. Baron was in his mid-thirties; Trotman was in his early fifties. But they died in strikingly different circumstances. Trotman drowned while attempting to save a girl's life at Schroon Lake, New York. He left behind him an organization that even today ministers powerfully worldwide with a staff of more than 2,500 people. Baron, on the other hand, met death far less gloriously. Toppled from leadership by drinking and shabby financial dealings, and separated from his wife and children, Baron died in a third-rate motel on the western edge of Amarillo, Texas. He left nothing.⁴ Two men with similar gifts and opportunities: one kept his eye on heaven while the other was lost to the pleasures of the world.

Again, it's a matter of basic orientation. Are our eyes on our bellies or on our beliefs? Are we able to appreciate the simple pleasures of life or must we fill our lives with toys and passing fads? Are we seeking by the grace of God to live a Christ-like life in the here-and-now or are we captured by the allure of this world? "Therefore, my brethren," says Paul to each of us, "stand firm thus in the Lord."

⁴ *Be Careful What You Call Impossible.* Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1989).





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Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, guide our hearts and minds, we pray, that we may always focus on the life of Christ and the call to be like him. Help us to ward off the allure of the current surroundings and the temptations of our time to stand firm in our faith and to preserve a true witness to your love and to your help through Christ. Amen.

