

A sermon by Dale Rosenberger, Minister
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My daughter Lise recently visited us, though she was so busy we hardly saw her. Afterward, I stopped in my tracks to notice--what's that?—a made bed in her room? What a contrast to teen years, wading through ankle-deep debris of sports gear, clothes, makeup, and books. What's up with her, I thought? Then it hit me. Lise visited us to care for a beloved high school friend. She hovered over that family because, apart from her friend's cancer, she had just lost her dad to ALS. Lise was delving into troubled waters that hardly existed for her as a gawky teen.

So how can a well-made bed and a family facing personal apocalypse relate to one another? Adm. Wm. McRaven's spoke of this in his University of Texas commencement speech. The first of his 10 lessons learned from basic SEAL training was *make your bed*. Every morning of basic training his instructors arrived in his barrack. They first inspected his bed. Done right, it had square corners, covers very tight, pillow centered under the headboard and blanket tidy at the bed's foot.

To us this might seem silly as a discipline to forge tough, battle-hardened SEALs. But in retrospect the wisdom of such a simple daily act impressed McRaven. If you make your bed every day, you have fulfilled the first task of the day. It gives you a small sense of pride and encourages you in another task and then another. By day's end, one task completed can morph into many heftier tasks completed. Just making your bed also reinforces the fact that *little things in life matter*. If we can't do little things well, we will never be ready for great things. And if by chance you have a miserable day--as will always be the case in trying to comfort a family fighting cancer and ALS--you will come home to a made bed—a bed *you* made.

In Luke 16, Jesus tells a puzzling parable commending a dishonest manager. Before contrasting dishonest wealth and true riches, Jesus offers a more general life lesson: “He who is faithful in very little is faithful also in much; and he who is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much.” Over time, Lise and we all learn we need a foundation of little things done right before tackling great things. We don't want to develop the habit of cutting corners even in insignificant things.

Along this line, researchers have discovered that one shattered pane of glass, unrepaired for a long time in any neighborhood, will cause malaise to creep in. People see shattered glass and reach conclusions. The owner doesn't care. The building is no longer in use. It's free for the taking. Litter and junk gather in doorways. Graffiti appears on walls. More bricks shatter more windows. Amazingly, it usually isn't the age of a building that brings it to ruin, turning useful structures into ugly, abandoned hulks. It isn't location or the size of the funds available for repairs. Unattended and neglected details slowly over time create their own ruin.

Actually, what is called the “broken window theory” inspired police departments across the nation to crack down on small stuff to keep out big stuff. Rudy Giuliani was an early proponent. As New York mayor, Giuliani started with the squeegee guys on the Bowery. You know those characters insisting on washing your windshield with filthy rags at red lights, then expecting a tip? He arrested them for jay-walking. Surprise, surprise, a huge percentage of them turned out to be felons.

A critic of the mayor claimed arresting turnstile jumpers was wasting police effort and money. They should be going after bigger fish, like the drug dealers. Guess what? Among that turnstile-jumping crowd they found no few drug dealers. You get the idea. Tending to small problems, instead of dissipating us, becomes the royal road into more momentous matters, ones harder to wrap our arms around. This is an essential spiritual rule: faithfulness in little leads to faithfulness in much.

So today we do well to ask: where do those broken windows lurk within our lives? We can name many: procrastination, gossip, quarreling, conceit, and all the rest. Cleaning up small gaps in our character gives God leverage to do great things with us.

Putting this more positively, where are the properly made beds propelling us into accomplishment? I mention one foundational habit on our day of new beginnings. What making your bed is to daily habits in the orbit of family and work, attending worship is to your week and God’s vast plan of establishing his reign in the world.

That’s surprising because, on the face of it, worship—like making one’s bed—doesn’t seem a game-changer. It doesn’t seem so essential as, say, educating our young, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, or sheltering the homeless. But make no mistake, every profound transformation the church has engendered for two millennia begins in this setting of worship and radiates outward from here.

On the face of things, worshipping God seems no big deal. Dawn’s light streams into your bedroom. Your eyes flutter open. You close them and roll over for a few more delicious moments. You throw your feet over the edge, stand, and stretch. After a cold splash of water, a hot coffee, a bite to eat, thoughts intrude like that of Ps. 118.24, “This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.” Over time we come to feel a rhythm deep within which enjoys a surprisingly honored place at our core: a rhythm of giving and receiving, reflection and action, work and rest, facing the truth of our lives and being granted a fresh start. Sunday worship centers us for everything else, setting up a rhythm across a lifespan.

What if every day were Monday? What dull and harried lives we would lead. No one is more oppressed than the overworked. What if every day were Saturday, when we run errands, do chores, and fix things? That would expose us to the risk of superficiality. No one is more oppressed than those living trapped in little lives. The ancient Hebrews set up Saturdays for the sabbath rhythm. Ancient Christian forebears adapted and expanded it into Sunday, Jesus’ day of resurrection. Sunday is the day of Jesus freed from the tomb, and us being freed from trivial lives.

So this cherished and splendid dynamic of gathering in a community we can count upon, sometimes more than our biological family; hearing a message of hope from God's Word, unlike the promises of every other earthly word; participating in sacraments speaking deeper than words, and then scattering to serve, having remembered who we really are: all of this goes back thousands of years. And once this singular rhythm sets up within us, it goes way deep into our bones.

Have you ever done physical therapy? I have post-surgery for my back, knees, shoulder, and pinky finger. I was skeptical at first. Doing silly little repetitions are going to bring me healing and wholeness, if I do them right and keep at it? I don't think so. It has worked for me time and again, allowing me stand and work. Like physical therapy, even worship that seems ho-hum will deeply transform your life.

Every Sunday morning truly recapitulates what our lives can mean, our dying and rising, offering up our human passions until they become divine in Christ. What if each week we began getting right one small, key, transforming, dynamic detail?

My father never asked me how I felt about attending worship. If we were in town and healthy, we did our best to go. It was a given. To be a Rosenberger, to better ourselves, we knew we needed it and belonged there. I never complained Edwin T. Clemens was a boring preacher. It was beside the point. If I didn't care what he said, I looked around me to see others fed by the eternal Word he proclaimed.

So the community was the basic unit of our spiritual life, not my individual whims. Even if we think we get nothing out of worship, imagine what it means to have a place in this narcissistic world to go weekly to remember, it is not all about me. Think of a community that, emptying us of our self-absorption and self-interest, then proclaims the true and living God dwelling within the void at our life's center. This is one essential detail to get right weekly, if we seek to live lives worth living.

On a Sunday as we receive new members, in an autumn as our church life starts up anew, I offer a covenant for member households that if you're in town between now and June, and no one is sick, you will do your best to attend worship. Sign it, fold it, and drop it in the plate. Only Gary and I will see it. If you are not interested, that is all right. Just leave it in the pews for another. It is a promise to work steadily to become your best person, the one God meant for you to become. It is a promise to start small working with this community to let God achieve great things through FCC. So simple, but the road to greatness for us all.

If only five families sign, I am calling it a success. I will look for five more families next year, and count each cluster as a building block for God's reign. If we want great things here, friends, it begins in details so small and invisibly significant. Amen.