

Series: It's a Seussical Life: Discovering Creative Ways to Live as God's Kids

Sermon #2: "Hanging Out in the Mud"

Books: *Yertle the Turtle and Other Stories*

Scripture: Philippians 2:1-9 (Have the humility of Christ)

Matthew 7:24-27 (Wise & foolish builders)

Text: Amos 5:11 "Truly, because you trample the weak, and because you tax their grain, you have built houses of carved stone, but you won't live in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you won't drink their wine."

Sermon Blurb: Are you trying to get "up" in the world? Are you striving for success, comfort, a good life? How are you doing that? How do you treat others when you are "upwardly mobile?" This second message in our Dr. Seuss series uses his story *Yertle the Turtle* to hear God's command to love people where they are, and for whom they are. Come and discover how we can treat others as objects of our love and affection rather than objects of our selfish attention!

Hymn Sing: Pastor David & Carol Humphrey

Welcome: Pastor David

Worship Set: -Sanctify

"Strong Enough to Save"

"Where I Belong"

"Cornerstone"

Worship prayer: Amanda

Book Reading: "Yertle the Turtle" - Scott

Kids to Kid's Church

Prayers: Pastor David

Offering: "New Doxology" -Sanctify

Message: "Hanging Out in the Mud"

PP#1: It's a Seussical Life: Discovering Creative Ways to Live as God's Kids

"Hanging Out in the Mud"

Amos 5:11 "Truly, because you trample the weak, and because you tax their grain, you have built houses of carved stone, but you won't live in them...."

It's a Seussical Life: Discovering Creative Ways to Live as God's Kids. *Yertle the Turtle: Hanging Out in the Mud*. Amos 5:11 "Truly, because you trample the weak, and because you tax their grain, you have built houses of carved stone, but you won't live in them...."

PP#2: Matthew 7:24-27 (CEB)

24 "Everybody who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise builder who built a house on bedrock. 25 The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It didn't fall because it was firmly set on bedrock. 26 But everybody who hears these words of mine and doesn't put them into practice will be like a fool who built a house on sand. 27 The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It fell and was completely destroyed."

One time, Jesus preached a famous sermon. It ended a little bit like this. Everybody who hears these words of mine and lives them out in their lives is like a wise builder, who built his house on solid bedrock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against the house, but it didn't fall down because it was firmly set on the solid and stable rock. But everybody who hears these words of mine and doesn't live by them is like Yertle, who built his throne on a very shaky foundation. The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind of a burp blew against this fragile foundation, and it fell down with a terrible crash; it was completely destroyed.

PP#3: *Image of Geisel and some of his characters.*

OK, I admit it. I flavored Jesus' famous story with a little Dr. Seuss. Not bad, though, huh? After all, they were both excellent storytellers! That's why we're spending some time with Dr. Seuss this fall here in church. We're using the quirky stories of Dr. Seuss to help us understand better God's teachings for our lives. Dr. Seuss seems to illustrate some of the Bible's teachings in such unforgettable ways. Living as a Christian means living by a different world view, perhaps labeled by some to be quirky and silly. Maybe we can think of it as living Seussically, especially if we think of it as Discovering Creative Ways to Live as God's Kids.

PP#4: *Image of Yertle the Turtle, content on a rock, first page of the book.*

Even though the stories seem so bizarre, it doesn't take long to begin to identify with them. Like Yertle. He's such a nice and fine turtle. We begin by liking him, don't we. After all, we like turtles, right? And the water is warm, there is plenty to eat. Everyone is happy.

Can you identify with him? Can you see this as you? Imagine yourself as a turtle, in charge of your pond, where everything is fine, and you are quite happy. You, as a turtle. You...turtle. Yertle.

PP#5: *Previous image, with subtitle, "YertURTLER"*

And notice, King Yertle sits solidly on a firm rock as his throne. He's on the solid rock, and all is well.

Now, I don't know how familiar Geisel was with the stories of the Bible, but one of the most famous kings who had absolutely everything, was King Solomon. King Yertle was king of the Island of Sala-ma-Sond.

PP#6: *Previous image, with additional subtitle, "Solomon's Pond = Sala-ma-Sond"*

Sala-ma-Sond reminds me of "Solomon's Pond."

And like Solomon in the Bible, Yertle was king of as far as his eye could see. But Solomon never seemed quite content. In fact, continued to amass wealth, power, and wives to ridiculous extremes. Solomon amassed 600 wives and 300 concubines! Was he happy? Well, he died miserable.

PP#7: *Image of Yertle frowning while sitting on his rock - second page of the book.*

But that's OK, because remember, we are identifying ourselves with Yertle, not King Solomon. Solomon is someone completely different...*right?*

You and I, we are content. We are perfectly happy with what we have, aren't we? I mean, we have plenty to eat, to wear, we have all of our necessities, and so much more. Why, we are wealthy, and enjoy so many luxuries. There are few people in this world with more than us! So, we are perfectly happy. We don't look around and see things we want, or don't yet have. Our eye is content.

Or, are we are more like Yertle than we like to admit? For, enough isn't enough!

I was at a small group meeting this past week. And as we were talking, someone said that commercials–advertisements–have as their primary purpose to make us not content. Why? So we will want something we don't yet have, and so we'll do something...like spend money...use our resources...to get it.

PP#8: Hanging Out in the Mud

1. Run a contentment “check”

1 Thess. 5:18 “Give thanks in all circumstances because this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”

Living creatively as God's kids means running a contentment check in our own lives. It means not buying into the message of scarcity, and learning to tell yourself that you don't *need* anything more to be happy. Gratitude is the antidote for the feeling like you just don't have enough. Running a contentment check means stopping and being mindfully grateful wherever you are right now. God's kids “give thanks in all circumstances because this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”

PP#9: Bulletin Insert: Sermon Notes

3 Things you really want:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

3 Things that are so glad you have:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

I want you to grab your bulletin and half piece of paper. I want you to make a list of three things you really want, things you've been thinking about for a while now. Perhaps a bigger home, or a different job, or a better car, or that newer snow machine, or the iphone 7, which has already been out now 10 days!, or the next item in your collection. Three things.

Now, they're probably not bad things. And they can be motivating and rewarding. But here's the danger: we can also let them become attitude changers for us. They can also slowly...ever so slowly...rob us of our contentment. And when we let them keep us from being content, they can keep us from being truly happy.

So, the antidote is to remember just how blessed we are. So, next to them, write down three things you are so glad you have, that are more important to you than those things you want. Perhaps you could say your family, your job, the joy of noticing each day as a gift. Notice that you have all that you need, and much of what you want. Remember to reign in your wanting so it doesn't drive you mad! We live by different standards. We don't need all that stuff to make us happy.

God's kids rest on a foundation of gratitude. And gratitude keeps your want list from becoming your discontentment list.

PP#10: Hanging Out in the Mud

1. Run a contentment “check”

2. Be a blessing to others

Hebrews 10:24 “Let us consider others carefully for the purpose of sparking love and good deeds.”

Poor Yertle wasn't content with what he could see. Now, this is not about being motivated or driven to improve yourself or to take on more responsibility. This discontentment was driven by a selfish desire for wanting more for himself. “If I could sit high, how much greater I'd be! What a king! I'd be ruler of all I *could* see.” Did you catch that change? It went from being king of all he *did* see, to wanting to be king of all he *could* see. Beware the “could!” The “could” is discontenting! It robs you of your satisfaction.

PP#11: *Image of Yertle happily stacked on other turtles' backs.*

So, the king used his resources to better his position. He commanded other turtles to stand on the rock, lifting him higher and higher. He used others, the very others who, as king, he had the responsibility to help and protect. This is an image of a king gone selfish.

You know, we may be just a bit like Yertle this way, too. We can tend to use others around us to get what we want, we can manipulate others for our benefit. We can take advantage of those we are called to help. Poor Mack's voice comes from the bottom of the stack, “Beg your pardon, King Yertle. I've pains in my back and my shoulders and knees. How long must we stand here, Your Majesty, please?”

Here again this Seuss story calls us to reflect on our own lives, and, as God's kids, calls us to ask God's question: how do we treat others? How can we do a better job of seeing others not as resources to bend to our advantage, but as opportunities for us to bend our lives towards them so we can be God's blessing? The famous quote nails it: “Love people and use things, not love things and use people.” Who can we lift up on our shoulders so they can see better?

PP#12: *Yertle, atop lots of turtles, looking angrily at the moon*

Notice that as Yertle was raised higher and higher, he also lost his own connection with the solid rock. More and more he is separated from his foundation by what he thought would make his situation better. But did his foundation grow stronger? Better? Is he happier?

Now it would seem that the higher Yertle got, the more content he should be. Right? And don't we sometimes fall into this same kind of thinking? How cool it would be if I could get the new game system. How awesome it would be to eat at that restaurant. How I deserve the weekend away, with the spa treatment and the shopping spree. How much happier I would be if I just...if I just.... Beware the “if I just....” It's the best friend of “could.” And they work together to rob you of your contentment.

Well, Yertle (now, this is Yertle, remember, certainly not us!) Yertle sees more and more, but the more he sees, the more he wants! “Could” and “if I just” were really doing a number on him. The more he saw and the more he had, the more he wanted. What he ruled, turned into ruling him. He became obsessed, addicted, unhealthily attached.

How clearly we can see it in Yertle. It's so obvious in *him*, isn't it? Driven by greed and selfishness, his desire for more grew more, and faster, than what he had! We clearly see Yertle's problem. Can we see that issue in us?

PP#13: Hanging Out in the Mud

1. Run a contentment “check”
2. Be a blessing to others
3. Keep a firm footing on your Rock

Matt. 6:33 “Instead, desire first and foremost God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

The antidote to this addiction is the best friend of gratitude. It’s seeking God first. When we choose God’s way, God’s priorities, God’s focus first, everything else goes in it’s right place. When we seek God, and God’s kingdom first, all the rest of our desires and wants are conformed to a healthy relationship to us, and we find true happiness and contentment.

PP#14: *Image of Yertle with mud on his head, and all the other turtles happy*

Well, as the story goes, Yertle’s quest for more, ultimately is his undoing. Little Mack, under such bodily stress and pressure, did a very little thing, he merely burped.

But that little burp, at the base of such a fragile pile, sent a little shake, a little shiver up the stack of turtles. But by the time it rippled to the top, it was a big enough shake, that it rattled Yertle right off his throne.

PP#15: Amos 5:11 “Truly, because you trample the weak, and because you tax their grain, you have built houses of carved stone, but you won’t live in them.”

Proverbs 16:18 “Pride comes before disaster, and arrogance before a fall.”

Yertle had built himself a throne that could not stand. It was so easily toppled and destroyed. Others, who should have been his support network, but because he was using them, could not help him. Amos 5:11 “Truly, because you trample the weak, and because you tax their grain, you have built houses of carved stone, but you won’t live in them.” Pride goes before a fall. This comes from Proverbs 16:18, an honest description of how life works, “Pride comes before disaster, and arrogance before a fall.” The problem, you see, is that in pride and arrogance, we’ve used our resources and our relationships selfishly. Then, when difficulties come—and they do!—we are easily toppled, because we’ve *used up* our resources and relationships, and we are alone.

PP#16: Hanging Out in the Mud

1. Run a contentment “check”
2. Be a blessing to others
3. Keep a firm footing on your Rock
4. Stay missionaries in the mud

Proverbs 11:25 “The one who blesses others is abundantly blessed; those who help others are helped.”

God calls us to love our neighbor as ourselves. God’s kids live differently. We belong down in the mud! We don’t use people to get above them, we stay with them to be a blessing and help. God calls us to be missionaries in the mud. Living in the mud means building our home on the solid Rock, not using people but instead showing God’s love to them, and spreading a very different way of life.

God's kids are brothers and sisters with Jesus, and we live like Jesus, and we live because of Jesus. He is our example and our source.

PP#17: Philippians 2:1-9 (CEB)

1 Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort in love, any sharing in the Spirit, any sympathy, 2 complete my joy by thinking the same way, having the same love, being united, and agreeing with each other. 3 Don't do anything for selfish purposes, but with humility think of others as better than yourselves. 4 Instead of each person watching out for their own good, watch out for what is better for others. 5 Adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus:

Philippians 2 calls us to live in the mud: like Jesus, and because of Jesus. "Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort in love, any sharing in the Spirit, any sympathy, complete my joy by thinking the same way, having the same love, being united, and agreeing with each other. Don't do anything for selfish purposes, but with humility think of others as better than yourselves. Instead of each person watching out for their own good, watch out for what is better for others." This is building your house on the solid Rock.

PP#18: Philippians 2:1-9 (CEB)

5 Adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus: 6 Though He was in the form of God, He did not consider being equal with God something to exploit. 7 But He emptied Himself by taking the form of a slave and by becoming like human beings. When He found Himself in the form of a human, 8 He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Verse 5, "Adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus: Though He was in the form of God, He did not consider being equal with God something to exploit. But He emptied Himself by taking the form of a slave and by becoming like human beings. When He found Himself in the form of a human, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

PP#19: Hanging Out in the Mud

1. Run a contentment "check"
2. Be a blessing to others
3. Keep a firm footing on your Rock
4. Stay missionaries in the mud

Now, imagine Yertle as a follower of Jesus in this way. What would that look like? Can you picture it? Can you picture you like this kind of Yertle? As God's kids, we live differently, perhaps even in ways our world calls strange and silly. But we build our homes on the solid rock that will withstand the storms of life. We run contentment checks of gratitude. We choose to love people and use things. We live the way of Jesus, putting God first. And we stay in the mud to be a blessing to others. This is the way of Jesus. This is made possible because of Jesus.

"Everybody who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise builder who built a house on bedrock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It didn't fall because it was firmly set on bedrock." (Matt. 7:24-25)

PP#20: *Repeat first image of Yertle content, sitting on a rock with happy turtles.*

“Turtles are toppled by mere burps and sneezes

“But Christ’s rock stands firm in all storms and breezes.”

(James W. Kemp, *The Gospel According to Dr. Seuss*, p. 14)

Amen.

Closing Song: “The Same Love”

Benediction: Pastor David