

Because a Little Bug Went Ka-choo! 2nd series "The Gospel According to Dr. Seuss"
 Matthew 25:31-40
 05 09 2010 Sam Jones UMC

Scripture Lesson

Introduction

You may not believe it, but here's how it happened.

*One fine summer morning . . .
 . . . a little bug sneezed. KA-CHOO!*

*Because of that sneeze, a little seed dropped.
 Because that seed dropped, a worm got hit.
 Because he got hit, that worm got mad.
 Because he got mad, he kicked a tree.*

*Because of that kick, a coconut dropped.
 Because that nut dropped, a turtle got bopped.
 Because he got bopped, that turtle named Jake
 Fell on his back with a splash in the lake.*

The story continues as one thing unexpectedly leads to another and another and another. Before all is said and done, the boat *Mary Lou* has a hole in her bottom and must be airlifted by helicopter to town. There the crew inadvertently runs into a circus parade. The final chaos is pure Seuss and totally hilarious.

Because a Little Bug Went Ka-Choo! ranks among my favorite books by Theodor Geisel. Although Geisel normally used the pseudonym of Dr. Seuss, the 1975 book was written under the name of Rosetta Stone and illustrated by Michael Frith.

I. Cause and Effect

Because a Little Bug Went Ka-Choo! teaches a seemingly simple lesson. **Actions always have consequences.** A fundamental law of creation is **the principle of cause and effect**. If I do THIS, then THAT will happen. If you select THIS button on the vending machine, then THAT will come out. $A + B = C$.

It's the **domino principle** of life. Push one domino and others begin to fall. One thing leads to another and another and another . . . oftentimes with unforeseen results.

We begin learning this important principle as infants and toddlers. Stacking blocks and watching them fall. Saying please to get a treat. Hot really does burn. Bite your brother and sit in time out. Sticking your tongue in an electrical socket is not a good idea. Consequences to our actions teach us critical life lessons.

The same lesson about cause and effect continues during adolescence. Practice and get better. Don't study and fail the test. Speed and lose your driver's license. Act responsibly and earn more freedom and privileges. Break curfew and get grounded.

By adulthood, you would think this simple lesson would have sunk deep into our minds and souls; but we are a hard-headed people. We don't want to think about or deal with the consequences of our actions.

Since the Garden of Eden, people have attempted to **avoid responsibility** for their actions. When God found those apple peelings on the ground and summoned Adam, he took it like a man and said, "Miss Eve did it!" Eve in turn blamed the serpent. And so it began.

There are two statements that children learn early and use often. "*I didn't mean to*" and "*It's not my fault.*" With a few refinements and flourishes, we continue to employ these excuses as teenagers and adults.

The great theologian, Jimmy Buffett, described in a song our desire to "*put a little distance between causes and effects.*" People constantly act as if there are no consequences for their actions. Then after dancing, we act surprised when the fiddler presents his bill. We must learn and relearn this same lesson over and again.

II. No Inconsequential Actions

In a world governed by the law of cause and effect, an important corollary principle is there are **no inconsequential actions**. All we do affects ourselves and others. The person that mutters, "*Well, I'm hurting only myself*" has not discovered this basic truth. Everything and everyone are interrelated. Seemingly small events can have huge consequences.

A prime tenet of "Chaos Theory" is "**the Butterfly Effect.**" In a chaotic system, a very small change applied at a particular point in time makes the future change in very dramatic ways. Something as small as a butterfly flapping its wings might affect the weather system on a global scale six months in the future.

Each word and action is a stone thrown into a still pond. The expanding ripples spread in unexpected ways to influence other people's lives. A nursery rhyme illustrates this point vividly:

*For want of a nail the shoe was lost.
For want of a shoe the horse was lost.
For want of a horse the rider was lost.
For want of a rider the battle was lost.
For want of a battle the kingdom was lost.
And all for the want of a horseshoe nail.*

III. Consequences

Small words and actions can have huge consequences for both bad and good.

BAD: On April 24, 1990, NASA put the **Hubble** space telescope into earth orbit. The new technology promised to produce pictures of our cosmos never before seen. However, a small error was made in production that resulted in a "spherical aberration" in the mirror only 1/25th the width of a human hair. Yet it prevented the telescope from focusing all the light into one point. A seemingly minor malfunction endangered a multi-billion dollar project. Thankfully, scientists eventually discovered a way to use computer enhancement to overcome the problem.

GOOD: I served First UMC of West Point from 1995 to 2000. On my first anniversary as the pastor, I preached a sermon about the church's future. One thing I mentioned in passing—and perhaps spent 30 seconds on the topic—was the need to renovate the church facility. Afterwards, a church member and prominent businessman named Bill Scott approached me. He said, “I would love to be involved in the effort to renovate our facilities.”

Well, the months went by and one thing led to another. A study committee gave birth to a building committee and a stewardship campaign. Four years later, the church had built a brand new Family Life Center and renovated both its Education Building and the sanctuary. The total cost was about \$4 million . . . and the project was completely paid for!

If it sounds like I'm bragging, please understand that I just held on while the Holy Spirit took us places we never imagined. The laity seized hold of the vision and made it into a reality. I never imagined what a single comment in a sermon might do.

We pause today to honor our mothers; and fathers will have their turn on the third Sunday in June. **Mother's Day** and **Father's Day** recognize the important role that parents and other adults play in a child's life. During the most influential years of life, words and actions can shape a child's life. It is both an awesome privilege and a frightening responsibility to *“raise up children in the way they should go.”*

IV. Therefore

Cause and effect. No word or action is inconsequential. All that we say and do affects us and others.

These are important principles for followers of Jesus Christ to understand. Most of us will not become missionaries or martyrs. Few will have the opportunity to serve God in blazing moments of glory. For the most part, Christian discipleship is acted out in the ordinary and everyday moments of life.

Fred Craddock taught preaching at Candler School of Theology. He once said: “We think giving our all to the Lord is like taking a thousand dollar bill and laying it on the altar: ‘Here's my life, Lord, I'm giving it all.’ But the reality for most of us is God sends us to the bank and has us cash in that thousand dollars for **quarters**. We go through life putting 25 cents here and 50 cents there.

To be kind to the neighborhood kid rather than say, ‘Get lost.’ To go to a committee meeting or serve your church when needed. To give a cup a water to a shaky old man at a nursing home.

Usually giving our life to Christ is not glorious. It's done in all of these little acts of love, 25 cents at a time. It would be much easier to put it all on the line at one time, we would know the outcome, that we have accomplished what we have been asked to do, but that's not what God wants.”

Holiness is practiced in the humdrum of routine; but these “ordinary” moments can have an extraordinary effect. In our Scripture lesson today from Matthew 25, Jesus described a scene from Judgment Day. The Lord will say to the faithful, *“Come, you who are blessed by my*

Father, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you visited me.”

And the righteous will answer him, “*Lord, when did we do these things for you?*”

And the King will answer, “*I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.*”

A donation of canned food. A cup of cool water. Hospitality to a stranger. Visiting the incapacitated and imprisoned. Spending the currency of righteousness 25 cents at a time.

RACK Ministry. Five years ago in February 2005, our congregation was given an unusual opportunity. Anonymous donors gave \$5,000 to the church for what came to be called our “Rack Ministry.” RACK stood for “*Random Acts of Christian Kindness.*”

Interested members of the congregation received an envelope with \$20 and a business card. The card quoted a verse from Philippians, “*And God is able to supply all of our needs*” along with the church name on the back. People were asked to give the money away with three guidelines: it couldn’t be used for personal benefit, it could not be given to an organization, and it had to be used for someone in real need.

It was an interesting experiment in Christian living. And people debated long and hard about how to use the money. Some folk devised a plan while others waited for a divine opportunity. Everyone agreed that they got out of it much more than they gave.

Acts of Christian kindness that might appear random but spring from a heart that loves God and seeks to serve others. And like dominoes, they set into motion events that might touch others’ lives in ways beyond all imagination.

In 2000, Kevin Spacey and Holly Hunt starred in a movie entitled ***Pay It Forward***. Haley Joel Osment played a seventh grade student named Trevor. His social studies teacher asked the class to present an idea that would change the world. Trevor came up with a simple but outlandish idea. Change the world through one act of kindness and decency at a time.

You do a favor for someone who really needs the help. Rather than asking for repayment, you challenge the person to “pay it forward” to three more people who need help in turn. Through arithmetic progression, millions would be affected.

Such a system sounds naïve and utopian. But suppose we took it seriously? It would become a pyramid scheme of God’s blessings that would change our lives and the lives of others.

Conclusion

Our words and actions are powerful. What we say and do each day ripples through time and eternity. Cause and effect. Action and reaction. Truth and consequences.

I invite you this morning to examine your own life with this question: **What if everyone was just like me?** Would there be . . .

- More litter on the road?
- More people recycling their trash?
- Fewer voters at the poll?
- More mentors at the local schools?
- Fewer acts of meanness and indecency?
- More acts of kindness and love?

Let me sharpen the question. What if every church member was just like me?

- Fewer volunteers at the church?
- More Sunday School teachers?
- Fewer people tithing at the church?
- Higher attendance at worship?
- A need to cancel Vacation Bible School?
- More people introduced to Jesus Christ?

You and I can make an eternal difference in the lives of others. Occasionally, it will occur in dramatic, recognizable ways. Much more often, it will happen in the humdrum of daily discipleship. Nothing is inconsequential. One thing really does lead to another.

The little bug sneezing led to a series of unpredictable events. The story concludes:

*Because of her (Mrs. Brown's) phone call, MORE help came . . .FAST!
 They tied a strong rope to the Mary Lou's mast.
 And because of that rope the boat didn't go down.
 But it had to be fixed so they started for town.
 And because they went THERE—it's true, I'm afraid—
 They ran right into a circus parade.
 And THAT started something they'll never forget.
 And as far as I know it is going on yet.
 And that's how it happened. Believe me. It's true.
 Because . . . just because . . . a small bug went KA-CHOO!*

Someday we will all gather before our Father's throne in heaven. Imagine the person next to you saying, "I am here today because of something YOU said or did."

All because a little bug went KA-CHOO. God bless you! Amen.