**Pickling in the Kingdom**

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**November 22, 2015**

One of the staple dishes other than rice for Koreans is kimchi. Most Koreans have it for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Traditional kimchi is fermented Napa cabbage and radish with red pepper flakes, garlic, scallions, ginger and brine all mixed together and fermented. On the average, Koreans consume about 40 pounds of kimchi per person annually. Kimchi is high in nutrition since it is made of vegetables; it contains a high concentration of fiber, provides over 50% of the daily-recommended amount of vitamin C and carotene and is also rich in vitamin A, both types of vitamin B, calcium, iron and even contains lactic acid bacteria. It is considered super food in Korea. As kimchi is high in nutrition, it is also high in its potent smell. For those who are not used to the food, many cannot get beyond the pungent smell.

Kimchi takes a lot of time before it can be consumed. In the olden times, kimchi had to be made and then buried in the ground for several weeks before it had fermented enough. Without this pickling process, kimchi is tasteless. The fermentation is what made kimchi edible and nutritious to all Koreans. It takes time.

The pickling process of kimchi or other food items like pickles is a good metaphor for our apprenticeship with Jesus. Becoming more like Jesus doesn’t happen overnight. It takes a great deal of time. Matter of fact, it takes a lifetime. The apprenticeship is a slow, life-long process that takes a great deal of attention and intention on our part. Being a faithful apprentice of Jesus requires us to arrange our lives around him and his teachings. This is why the Sermon on the Mount is so challenging for Christians. Broken into small parts and sometimes it seems manageable. Put it all together and it seems overwhelming. Yet, it is what we are called to and so we learn to pickle in the kingdom.

At the end of the Sermon of the Mount, Jesus teaches us to choose the narrow gate. When we live in the kingdom, we are free to follow Jesus and his teachings or not follow him. Jesus doesn’t force his ways upon us. He continually invites us to a better way of living, the way of the kingdom. So, when we choose the narrow gate over the wide gate, we choose to follow his difficult teachings. We live into the beatitudes, we go beyond just following the Ten Commandments as it is on the surface, we learn to love our enemies, give away our resources, relinquish control over our lives and we learn to let go of our worries. We choose to walk alongside one another while seeking God’s wisdom and understanding of our neighbor and our world.

By walking through the narrow gate, we choose discipleship because the cost of non-discipleship is too great. No one wants to give up abiding peace or not experience overwhelming love. No one wants to miss out on eternal hope or unending grace. The cost of non-discipleship is too much. So we choose discipleship or apprenticeship in order to experience all God desires to give us.

As we learn to pickle in the kingdom, we work to bear good fruit. Jesus says we will be able to recognize the apprentices of Jesus by their fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. So when the Spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control in our lives, even in midst of chaos and struggle, we are bearing good fruit. This doesn’t happen magically when we choose to follow Jesus. It takes a lifetime of pickling in the kingdom to produce these types of fruits.

In addition, while we experience the good fruit of living in God’s kingdom while on earth, we are also guaranteeing our inheritance in eternity. Jesus said “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me you evildoers.” (v. 21-23) Jesus is reminding us that apprenticeship is not just about doing. It is about the relationship with him. Behind all of his teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus focused on the heart, not the outward actions. Once our heart is in the right place, then our actions will reflect the state of our heart. So when the day comes we leave our earthly bodies, we will be ushered into eternity because of our heart, not just our actions.

Finally, as we pickle in the kingdom, our apprenticeship will provide a firm foundation for our lives. Take notice that the rains came, the streams rose and the winds blew on not only the house with a sandy foundation but also for the house with the solid foundation. God does not prevent tragedies and difficult situations from occurring to people who live in the kingdom. Bad things happen to all people. However, our apprenticeship gives us the tools to get through the difficult storms of life. Our relationship with Jesus helps us to deal with tragedies because we know our identity is found in him. We are reminded that we live in his unshakeable kingdom and we have hope in the present and in the future. More we become like Jesus, more we are able to let go of our fears, our anxieties and our biases. We can be assured that God is still in charge of his creation and our foundation will never crumble when it is built on our faith in Christ our Savior.

So, we learn to be like Jesus. We become his apprentice and we imitate everything he did because Jesus narrative matches reality. No one has ever followed his teachings and been disappointed. No one has ever put his teachings into practice and found them false. His instructions perfectly coincide with reality. We will not find ***The Good and Beautiful Life*** any other way than by obeying Jesus. We must conform to his ways. It just takes a lifetime of choosing Jesus and his teachings daily. We just keep pickling until we are just right in the presence of our Lord.