

Sonya Dyer and Jackie McMakin: Talking about Growing

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Seekers Church
June 4, 2000

Talking about Growing

Sonya:

We sort of decided we wanted to make this conversational because that really is what this community is about for us. As those of you who worship here regularly know, I will be retiring at the end of this month after 24 years in this position. Over those years, many wonderful things have happened and so we want to celebrate that and see that as part of the excitement of today. The other thing that is wonderful about today is that the kids and young people are part of our worship always on this particular Sunday. And right from the beginning in the first year when Fred Taylor, David Lloyd and I went down to Duke University and talked with John Westerhoff about how to include the children in the worship life and the full life of the community, one of things he said to us was, "Keep telling the story". Tell the historical story and tell the story of this community. And that is part of what Jackie and I are going to be bringing today. Also I feel like some of the points we're going to try to hold up are things that young people and adults can see in their lives no matter where they are – in church or other places – that they are really things to weave. So, join us in our conversation.

Jackie:

I have a word before the conversation. This morning's Scripture is about transition of leadership and that's the period we're in. An idea popped into my head a few months

ago, I asked Sonya about it and she liked the idea. I don't know about you, but when Sonya leads the liturgy, her prayers have always struck me as having terrific depth. They're like a window to her soul. If you know Sonya, handwriting and paperwork is not her thing. So I said what would you think if you shared these prayers with the congregation? Give me your best ones or your favorites. I'll put them into the computer, we can go over them and put them in a form that everyone could have, and we could have a present from you. Sonya liked this idea. So the last few months we've had this busy little bee project and we've prepared a booklet for you with the support of Meg Kinghorn who took all the materials and put it together in this beautiful presentation. Wow!

Sonya:

Let's show the picture. [Cheers and clapping]

Jackie:

So we got excited about our project and we didn't want to stop. So, I said how about doing some reflections. I've just been fascinated with Sonya's style of leadership. She doesn't preach much, she doesn't lead meetings and she doesn't teach much in the School for Christian Living. So, we worked out some topics and this book contains her reflections on her style of leadership and all kinds of other wonderful goodies. And Jane Engle had done an interview with Sonya when she was 70 and Tish typed that up for us so we have excerpts from the interview in the booklet. So, we love [this booklet](#) and we know you will too.

Sonya:

One quick thing before we go on. Not only has this been a lot of fun, but it turned out that the scripture in Ephesians this week was absolutely right for me at least. It was so rich in terms of what we're up to today. And I just wanted to call your attention to it because we didn't hear it today and you might not have read it this week. But a few of the lines say things like, "The eyes of my heart have been enlightened more deeply" and that has helped me to know that to which I am called. This is just my own spiritual autobiography. And our common commitment to the Gospel story has encouraged "a spirit of wisdom and revelation in my knowledge of God" and in our knowledge of

God together. And that is a power for all of us. I just want to hold up these Scripture as we continue our sharing together.

Jackie:

So after we did our wonderful work of art, we needed to decide what we wanted to do with the sermon. And we selected six topics to share with you this morning that seemed to represent the faith stance and also faith practice of Sonya. And these six are the **centrality of prayer**, the **importance of faith**, the **generation of joy**, Sonya's **partnership style**, **covenant** and **friendship**. It's communion Sunday so we're going to race through these in 10 minutes.

So, Sonya, the **centrality of prayer**: The thing that has struck me all these years is what I just said – the depth of your prayer. It must take a heck of a lot of courage to get up on a Sunday morning, no matter what's been going on in your life, to prayer on our behalf and put your heart and soul into it and we're drawn in as well. I know that comes from your daily prayer and you're holding us all week long. But how is that?

Sonya:

I must admit that being able to say publicly words that are true for you, not just written in a book, and at the same time stay conscious of the variety of understandings of theology in our midst is a challenge. The one thing that is the redeeming grace is that we also have prayers that we all are a part of and offer. And so, the power of that to undergird what the person standing up here is offering is so important. To here the voices in the room, to hear the young people sometimes say a word or two about what's going on for them, to hear from different ages and places adds to the power. And I hope the encouragement of the prayers I have sought to offer over the years has enabled that to be rich and full.

Jackie:

Faith: We've had many talks over the years about faith and God, faith and Jesus, what do we believe, what don't we

believe. One thing that struck me is your absolute unwavering faith in all of our gifts. You've believed in us all these years, you've call us forth – no matter what conflict, difference, craziness comes out – you've coached us to have patience, stay with it, give it time. We've seen tons and tons of fruits come from this and it's easy for us to have faith knowing how you've had faith in us.

Sonya:

Those are wonderful words. But I also think that we're gathered around a faith system that makes all this possible. That's because we're gathered around some common understandings of how we want to, not only live the faith of history, but keep enabling it to be renewed and refreshed and critiqued and reexamined. We often bring our gifts to that. And I think that's been one of the great joys for me and I think for you all too to have this opportunity to have a container where faith is explored, and that we've trusted each other to be about that. And I have had a sense of faith in all of us, as well as faith in myself, that even though at times there is a stumble or something that isn't the way I might have wanted it to be, we have really sought to be about that together. And that in that way, in going back to John Westerhoff, we have enabled our children to be a part of a story that keeps going on and being written and that they are helping to write too.

Jackie:

Joy! Whenever we bury Sonya, on her tombstone could be "Sense of Humor." Because you've brought such a wonderful light touch to our life, we always have so much fun laughing about all kinds of things and this is a key piece that you bring us.

Sonya:

There is another part of generating joy – the wonderful experience when all the pieces of something come together and there is a real sense of unity and the Spirit's presence. And since the worship life has been so dear to my heart right from the start, that's the place where I really often find that joy – of the unexpected, the opportunity for things to happen, and for all of us to be joined together in the deep sense of joy and fun and its embrace.

I'm especially aware of when the kids wrote the service a couple of seasons ago and offered that and we used that throughout the whole season and there was a particular joy and blessing in that – not only because of the source of it – but what it offered us in knowing them as we always ask them to know us.

Jackie:

Partnership style: I can remember back in the olden days when Gordon Cosby announced that he was no longer going to lead us all and he was calling forth new leadership. Many of us were afraid. How can we get along without this charismatic figure who is leading the way, always a bit out in front? And then you and Fred came along and you modeled a completely different style. First of all, it was a male/female partnership. And that's pervaded Seekers ever since. But even more profound for me is that you've been along side of us all the time, not so much out front, but along side of us, partnering with us in mission groups, partnering with us individually like we've done on this project, partnering with us to solve our problems. This has been a key piece.

Sonya:

It is partly a key piece because that is the way I most find my gifts evoked – in partnership. I find that that's where life springs for me and I feel like through all these years we've had all these ways to create and recreate our life out of different kinds of partnership. And I really feel like that's been a blessing that I've had and that because my gifts have been evoked that way, I have a generous spirit about evoking other people. So, I want to say that partnership is a great way to go in a lot of different places and what wonderful fruit comes from it.

One of the things Jackie and I have talked about is what it means to have a **covenant relationship**. And certainly, covenant is what has shaped our life in community here. It is what has given us the forms. We have agreed to be in covenant relationship with one another, not only interpersonally, but also to be about a vision that we hope is calling us into the world and into the future that God is planting in each one of

our hearts. Covenant is about those activities and those things that we do that are a response to that sense of call, that sense of where is it that I'm to offer things in the world. The power and strength of that comes from our being covenanted with one another. And we've covenanted with each other in a number of ways that have gone on and on. I'm thinking about Kathy coming back. We've been going to South Africa since 1978. That was when Anne and Fred first took a banner that Liz helped us make to South Africa. And we kept that commitment all these years. We've been involved with Flock all these years. We've been committed to our kids and the things that can go on across generational lines all these years. And that comes to me, at least partly at least, from the level of covenant we have with one another.

Jackie:

I think of covenant as very practical. Like making dates on the phone. Yesterday I was on your house doing the final changes of this, Billy called and you made a date on the phone. And keeping those dates and being open to what can happen in those dates is a very practical manifestation. Just meeting with us over and over again.

And finally, the other part of covenant is friendship. You and I became friends when I was pregnant with Peg. That was 37 years ago. And now Larry, your oldest, is 44 and we've lived to tell the tale. The kids haven't killed each other, our husbands are still intact, our friendship has flourished. I don't think you learn this in seminary, having been to seminary. They don't tell you the most valuable thing you can ever give another person is your friendship. That's what you've given all of us. That's such an important, wonderful piece.

Sonya:

I know **friendship** is important to me. As we saw before, the

Scripture was about Jesus calling people his friend. And that's very important Biblically, as well as the social, relational thing we're all aware of now. And I think the friendships you have offered to me and what you've been open to in being a friend have nourished me and made it possible for me to be about a lot of things I've been about. I was thinking this morning as I was putting on this little necklace of Samantha who made this. And it was a real expression of friendship, not in a very dramatic way perhaps, but it was something she chose thinking the colors would be nice for me and it would be something I would enjoy having. So, those are little expressions of friendship, but they're so powerful. Because central to all these things we've been talking about is **love**. This morning we are having a feast. And when I grew up in the Brethren church, we called communion a love feast. This morning we're committed to being a part of feasting on love – feasting on God's love and the love we have for one another, our love for God and the love we have to express in the world. So, this is all about how to understand and experience love here at this table as well as every day. And as a final word from Ephesians, I just want you all to know that "I will not cease giving thanks for you and remembering you in my prayers." Amen.