



Thoughts
 from Year of Covenant Facilitator George O'Reilly
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Striving to be my best self

I have sometimes quoted a quip from Garrison Keillor of *A Prairie Home Companion*: "They say wisdom comes with old age — but sometimes old age comes alone." I suppose I haven't quite admitted I am old yet, but I can feel myself getting there.

I also should admit I haven't quite gotten to "wise" yet, but I can feel God drawing me at times toward that. Over time the example of Paul dealing with the People of God with whom he had been ministering for so long seems to give me a glimpse of what having old age and wisdom come together might be like. I in no way begin to approach the wisdom Paul displayed, but I do admire it.

"It is God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' that has shone into our hearts to enlighten them with the knowledge of God's glory, the glory on the face of Christ. But we hold this treasure in pots of earthenware, so that the immensity of the power is God's and not our own. We are subjected to every kind of hardship, but never distressed; we see no way out but we never despair; we are pursued but never cut off; knocked down, but still have some life in us; always we carry with us in our body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus, too, may be visible in our body. Indeed, while we are still alive, we are continually being handed over to death, for the sake of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus, too, may be visible in our mortal flesh." — 2 Corinthians 4:6-11

One thing I have learned is that to whatever extent wisdom and old age have come together in my life, they have met at the places where I addressed myself and my own choices more than at the places where I worked with the choices of others. My first concern must always be how I engage the gifts and empowerment of God through my life to be my best self. And engaging this best self always includes sacrifice for the good of others. It always calls me to engage the suffering of Jesus in some very real way for the benefit of those who are or who may be becoming the People of God.

I, like most of us, am more inclined to focus on myself in a self-absorbed way. For example, I think, "How might I insulate myself from the aggravations or intrusions of others?" Paul models being our best self while moving closer to those whom we have sometimes felt were the cause of our suffering.

In modern terms, this could be called self-differentiation. Paul calls it embracing the suffering of Jesus. The path to biblical wisdom involves readiness to move toward others while being centered in God and empowered by the Holy Spirit. It involves suffering.

I honestly believe this is the task before us as individuals, as leaders, and as congregations in Ohio Conference. Is there an easier way? Perhaps, but I doubt that old age and wisdom will come together by it — for leaders, for parishioners, or for fellowships.

As we approach our next step in the Event Two of our Year of Covenant together, perhaps we would do well to ask, "How can we be our best selves?"

With respectful affection,

George O'Reilly
 Year of Covenant Facilitator



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