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“Primary Usability”

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John 16:12-15

There is a new trend in electronics that is long, long overdue.

It is a trend toward simplicity. Finally!

Complexity in that realm has finally run its course, and not a minute too soon.

It is not yet obvious, but manufacturers are realizing that many things have become so complicated that they are virtually unusable.

This remote control from our DVD player is a good example.

This remote has 50 buttons, and I use 3 of them— Play, Pause, and Stop.

I am sure this can do very impressive things, but it is vastly more intricate and complicated than my feeble mind can grasp.

Complexity overload affects every area of modern life, so any movement toward simplicity is most encouraging.

Jeff Goldstein, vice president of marketing for audio and video in Sony’s U.S. electronics division recently said:

“Consumers have had it with excessive complexity. Now our real challenge is to make these devices accessible and usable.”

Accessible and usable works for me.

There is already a home audio-networking product called The Zone Player that has developed a cult following because it is so simple and easy to use.

It has only 12 buttons.

Steve Jobs, the CEO of Apple was adamant in his desire to keep the Ipod simple. During the planning phase, Jobs got a lot of pressure to make it more complicated, to add more buttons, but he held his ground in keeping it simple.

For years now, the Ipod has been the number one seller in the MP3 field.

According to Jakob Nielsen, CEO of a consulting firm in the Silicon Valley, there is a primary rule of usability that should be applied to the marketplace.

Something should first present users with a limited number of features, those that are most useful, and then allow them to access more advanced features, as they deem necessary.

You do not want to overwhelm people right from the start.

Jesus understood this concept, because this primary usability plays a role in what Jesus tells his disciples before his death.

Knowing that his time with them is coming to an abrupt end, Jesus tries not to overwhelm them with instructions and advice.

This might seem very strange to us, considering that these people are the ones

upon whom Jesus is going to rely to carry on his ministry.

These people are his legacy, his only chance to be remembered.

But they are not ready to hear all that he could tell them. In fact, Jesus says:

“I still have many things to tell you, but you cannot bear them now.”

Jesus recognizes that they have so much on their minds and hearts,  
they could not absorb anything more.

Besides, they have not yet had the experiences which will enable them to  
comprehend what he needs to tell them.

Jesus knows that there are encounters and situations ahead which will  
scare them, strain their faith, and test them almost to the breaking point.

They will all be persecuted, they will all feel  
forsaken and forgotten, many will die violent deaths.

He cannot burden them with all of that now.

He is saying, “There are things I want to tell you, but you are not in a position  
to understand.”

Jesus is saying that they have not yet experienced enough to be able to  
absorb all that he could share. It would not be helpful now.

Years ago the late Adlai Stevenson wrote about this phenomenon in human life,  
how sometimes we just cannot absorb more than we are ready to understand.

Stevenson wrote:

“What someone knows at 50 that they did not know at 20 is, for the most part,  
incommunicable. All the observations about life which can be communicated  
easily are as well known to someone at 20 as they are at 50.

By 20 you think you’ve heard it all, read it all, seen it all.

But you have not lived it all.

What you know at 50 that you did not know at 20 is not knowledge of ideas  
or words or concepts or formulas, but knowledge of suffering, people, places,  
disappointment failures, sleeplessness, devotion, love—  
the human experiences that only come with time and perhaps too,  
a little faith and reverence for things you cannot see.”

I am thankful that I did not know at 20 what I now know at nearly 50.

I would not have been able to handle that information at all.

Human life and our Christian faith, function best in terms of primary usability,  
receiving what you need when you need it,

not a moment too soon or too late.

I think primary usability is a good description of how we love new people into our  
family of faith. I would hope that our new members today would agree,

that we try not to overwhelm people with too much information.

We want people first and foremost to know that they are loved,  
no matter what they have done or failed to do.

We are intentional in the way we disciple new people into the faith,  
by loving them and inviting them to share the love they have found with others.

Gradually, we invite them to grow in wisdom and spiritual maturity.

Speaking of how we welcome new people into this faith community,

I have to ask, has anyone in this very room been touched  
by the ministry of Gayle Grimes?

As Hospitality Coordinator she has made this church so much warmer,  
a much more hospitable, loving place, and we are so grateful.

I don't think I will ever have another female staff member who is a  
Harley Davidson riding Grandmother.

You see, we think it is far more important to live your beliefs,  
than to talk excessively and make others feel inferior and inadequate.

I have learned over the years that for many unchurched people, Christianity can be  
a huge stumbling block. To an outsider, it appears to be a religion for the initiated,  
primarily designed for those who were born into it.

It can be very complicated to the outsider who is unfamiliar with its doctrines.

Of course we all know what salvation means, and eternal life,  
atonement, eschatology, the Trinity, the second coming, the Holy Spirit,  
but it's daunting to a new believer.

Similarly, the Bible can be so intimidating to those who have never read it.  
Nearly everybody feels like they should have read it, but most people have not,  
and they are afraid to admit it.

The Bible scares and intimidates people.

So we are on the right track in loving people into the faith,  
welcoming them and sharing with them what they need to know at the time,  
and inviting them to gradually grow into a deeper and more mature faith.

By the way, you will have many opportunities to do just that this Fall  
with a wonderful array of Adult Classes we will be offering to help you  
grow in your love and knowledge of God.

Back to our Scripture lesson from John 16,  
knowing the disciples lack of maturity and preparation,

Jesus does not want to burden those he loved with things they could not handle.

But then he does say something that changes everything.

He tells them that after he is gone, the Holy Spirit will come to guide them  
and convey blessings and comfort.

Jesus assures them that the Spirit will bring His presence to them after he is gone.  
What a comfort to be assured that although Jesus will not be with them physically,  
he will always be with them spiritually.

Jesus assures his disciples, and also assures us,  
that we will have God's power and God's peace as close as our very fingertips.  
God will give us the understanding we need right when we need it, not before.  
Through the Holy Spirit, we will be guided and prepared.

This text from John reminds me so much of the often quoted advice given by  
Rainer Maria Rilke in the classic book Letters To A Young Poet.

I know many of you are familiar with this, but it bears repeating in this context.  
In 1903 Rilke wrote to his young 19 year old friend who was seeking advice about  
a variety of things that were vexing and perplexing him, especially love.

Rilke wrote:

“Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart, and try to love the questions  
themselves....do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given to you  
because you would not be able to live them.

And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now.

Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it,  
live along some distant day into the answer.”

It is amazing how pertinent this is for our individual lives, and for this juncture in  
the life of our church.

We had all hoped that by now we would have the perfect location in which  
to build our new facility. We believed we would be much further along in this  
process of relocation by now.

But we do not want to rush into something that we might regret in the long run.

The leaders of this church know that we cannot correct the wrong location,  
and we want to be very thoughtful, intentional, and good stewards  
of what is entrusted to us.

Therefore, we must walk by faith, and trust that the right path will become  
clear just when we are ready to follow it.

We will be given what we need when we need it, I am completely convinced.

Oswald Chambers was a Scottish man who converted to Christianity as a teenager.

He studied at the University of Edinburgh and received a call to ministry. He would go on to preach and teach about the Bible in the United States, England, and Japan. He is primarily known for one book, published in 1935, which is consistently among the top ten titles of religious classics.

It is called My Utmost for His Highest.

In this classic book, Chambers warns the followers of Jesus against thinking that uncertainty was a bad thing.

He wrote, “The nature of the spiritual life is that we are certain in our uncertainty.

We are not uncertain of God, just uncertain of what God will do next.

If our certainty is in our beliefs, we will become self-righteous, overly critical, and unable to change and grow. But when we have right relationship with God, life is full of spontaneous, joyful uncertainty and expectancy.”

We are on a journey of spontaneous, joyful uncertainty and expectancy.  
A journey that we cannot fully understand right now, but the way will become clear eventually.

In the meantime we know that we are forgiven, we are redeemed,  
and we are dearly loved.

And for now, that just might be all we need to know.

Amen.

