

Series: Joy in the Journey

Today: Pressing On

Text: Exodus 20:8-11; Philippians 3:12-14

A Sermon preached by the Rev. Randolph T. Riggs, D.Min.

Sunday, June 6, 2010

First Presbyterian Church of Lancaster, PA

This morning we are concluding the series we began last September entitled *Joy in the Journey*. For nine months we have examined the stories of our forbearers in the faith, and we have asked the question how their journeys intersect our journey as we attempt to follow Christ for such a time as this.

Our text this morning is a powerful. It comes from one of Paul's final letters before he was martyred for his faith in Christ. It is a summing up of how he wants to be remembered: "*Forgetting what lies behind, and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.*"

Paul was at the end of his career. In the verses which come just before our text, he lists his impeccable credentials before his dramatic conversion experience on the Damascus Road. He was a man of faith who followed the Jewish law to its finest details. He was a leader of the Jewish religion; a Pharisee. In defense of his faith he had persecuted Christians sending many of them to an early death. He was a spiritual giant in Judaism. Yet after he met Christ in his dramatic encounter on the way to Damascus, he says none of those credentials made sense any more. The love of God in Jesus Christ grasped him in such a way that he counted everything he had accomplished in life as rubbish compared to what God had done for him. "*Forgetting what lies behind, and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.*"

This morning I want to explore with you this question: *What is your purpose in life? What are you living for? Can you give me, in one sentence, the mission statement by which you organize the hours in your day, the days in your week, and the weeks in your year?*

Recently I heard the story of a man who was sharing with a friend that he had decided to retire early. His friend asked him, 'Retire? Why would you do that? What are you going to do when you retire?' The man responded, 'I'm going to sit on the couch and watch TV all day every day.'" His friend responded, "If you do that you'll be dead in a year." The man looked at his friend with puzzled look and asked why, and his friend said, "If the lack of purpose in your life doesn't kill you first, your wife will."

I used to think that the question of purpose was a question reserved for younger people. Then I got old, or at least older, and I am discovering that having a purpose in life is what helps us get out of bed in the morning to face a new day. People without purpose become depressed, or bitter, or angry, and sometimes they become all three.

Several weeks ago I attended a retreat on men's spirituality with 50 other men ranging in age from 25 to 85. At that retreat all of us were challenged to draft a one sentence mission statement to which we would be willing to give our lives.

This was not a new exercise for me. I have done it before. In fact the last time I did it was when I was felt called to leave my position in Jenkintown, PA, but I didn't know where I was going. A friend challenged me to pray about it long and hard lest I accept a call to someplace that did not help me fulfill that purpose. So I drafted a one sentence statement which was this: *"I am called to lead a community of faith in an urban setting with enough people resources and financial resources to make a difference in the city where it is located."*

By the grace of God, that statement brought me to serve this church, but it is not enough to be a guiding principle in my life. It is not a statement like Paul's. So the challenge to put down on paper what it is that guides my life today was a good one. This is what I wrote: *"I am called to create a world where people know how deeply they are loved by God and how God longs for each of us to see visions and dream dreams we may think are impossible. I will then help those whom God loves make those dreams a*

reality. I will begin with my family. I will extend this to my brothers and sisters in Christ. I will offer my experience to community organizations which serve those whom the rest of society would just as soon forget.

So back to my question: *What is your purpose in life? What are you living for?* It doesn't make any difference if you are 15, 25, 55 or 85. How are you allowing God to use you today?

It was the mission statement which you helped to create in 2007 which has led us to the changes in our program we will offer in September. The vision of this church calls us to *Discover the Heart of Christ in the Heart of the City*. In order to fulfill that vision, we have six areas of mission: *Inspiring Worship, Extravagant Hospitality, Spiritual Growth, Caring Community, Commitment to the City, and Outreach and Mission*.

After living with our vision for about a year and a half, we began to become aware that our Sunday morning schedule no longer fit the vision. In the area of Inspiring Worship, we discovered that we had created a schedule which, for all practical purpose, meant that our children and youth were excluded from being part of our worshipping community. In the area of Spiritual Growth, we had created a schedule which made it difficult for us to fulfill our baptismal promises to our children because our prime pool of potential teachers wanted to be in worship at our Cherry Street Service. We were also limited in adult spiritual formation classes because of the schedule. In the area of Extravagant Hospitality, our Sunday Schedule was so complicated that visitors had a very difficult time figuring it out.

So after over a year of study, we have decided to change our schedule beginning in September. During June, July and August we will give the service times a test run, so beginning next week we will continue to have three services on Sunday mornings. One service will be at 9:00 a.m. and there will be two concurrent services at 10:30 a.m. Our 8:30 a.m. Early Service moves to 9:00 a.m. Our 11:00

Traditional Service moves to 10:30 a.m., and our Cherry Street Contemporary Service moves to 10:30 a.m. So next week, you can complain to whomever you like, and you will likely find an ally because next week everyone will be making a change.

Beginning on September 19th the worship times will remain the same, but at 9:00 a.m. there will be education classes for all ages—children, youth, and adults. Helping our children appreciate music leadership is important, so Cherub Choir and our Youth (Teen Aged) Choir will be part of the curriculum during the Sunday school hour. At 10:00 a.m. we will have a half hour break for a time of fellowship in the Parlor and in Shirk Hall. At 10:30 a.m. we will have two concurrent services: Cherry Street and Traditional. Children will worship with us for the first half hour, then they will be excused to enrichment activities, and the Children’s Choir will be a major offering during this second hour. Youth will remain with us for the full worship hour, and we hope to utilize their gifts in leadership roles. The Session of this church did not make these decisions lightly. They believe, and so do I, that this schedule is a better way to help us fulfill the Vision and Mission of our church, and we are asking you to support us as we make the changes. They did not sit around and say to themselves, “*How can we make our lives more complicated?*” They want to help us all grow in our commitment and press on to the heavenly call of God in Jesus Christ.

So let me ask the question again. *What is your purpose in life? What are you living for? Can you give me, in one or two sentences, the mission statement by which you organize the hours in your day, the days in your week, and the weeks in your year?* If you cannot, I urge you to do some work on it this week. If you can, then I invite you to *press on* and to support this church as we *press on* to the heavenly call we feel God has given us as we *Discover the Heart of Christ in the Heart of the City*.