



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for August 21, 2022
“Making a Difference: Our Call to Follow Christ”
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: Philippians 3:7-14

Vision and Values

They say that when it comes to sermonizing, you’d do well not to repeat yourself. I figure that those who preach repeat themselves all the time. We have good news to tell, and it bears repeating.

I had a friend in college who got into some hot water when it came to repeating himself. He took a student appointment one year and was super excited about doing so. His first Sunday in the pulpit he offered his testimony, which included telling everyone how God had saved him from a life of alcohol. Everyone readily received what he had to say. In fact, they were quite inspired.

The second Sunday my friend stood in the pulpit he offered the same testimony. He did the same his third Sunday, and again on his fourth. The following week some of the faithful at his church gathered around him and told him that he might want to talk about other things, after all there was a lot to talk about when it came to Jesus. My buddy got the message and learned a wonderful lesson.

I try not to repeat myself when it comes to preaching, but I fully realize that there are some things that bear repeating. We will be doing some of that over the next couple of months as we re-visit the vision and values of this church.

We last talked from the pulpit about our vision and values almost three years ago. It was well before the start of the pandemic. I have always been of the mind that a congregation needs to keep its vision and values front and center, so to talk about our vision and values during this upcoming season is an okay thing to do.

Our vision is our call. It is the call of God as he seeks to bring about his preferred future for our common life together. You know our vision, *“We seek to make a difference by following Christ, offering hope, serving others, and loving everyone.”*

Our core values form our identity as a church. They speak volumes about God’s work to form us into the people he wants us to be. Our core values include being *“Christ-centered, Biblically-based, discipleship-driven, community-oriented, mission-minded, and family-focused.”*

We begin today by talking about what it means to follow Christ, and how doing so will make a difference in our lives individually, and our life together as a congregation.

We read today that great passage from Philippians 3:7-14 where Paul writes about his own passion about following Christ.

Let’s read then Philippians 3:7-14.

Philippians 3:7-14

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

I Want to Know Christ

The Apostle Paul had quite the resume, and he was not shy about sharing it. He does so in Philippians 3:4-6.

- Paul was circumcised on the eighth day.
- He considered himself a Hebrew of Hebrews.
- Regarding the law, he was a Pharisee.
- As to zeal, he persecuted the church.
- As to legalistic righteousness, he was faultless, or so he thought.

All these things Paul was willing to give up for the sake of following Jesus.

Paul writes, *“But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of know Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things.”* (Philippians 3:7-8)

In the world of high finance and business it is all about profit and loss, isn't it? Such things are tracked down to the penny.

As we have come to know, life is filled with its gains and losses to which all of us are constantly adjusting. Paul considered whatever gains he had made now as loss for the sake of knowing Christ. Paul was a Christ-follower which made all the difference in his life and the life of the world. It didn't matter to Paul what he gave up. Christ meant that much to him.

The *NIV Study Bible* talks about Saul's conversion as *“the great reversal.”* Again, it didn't matter what he had to give up. Christ was that important to him.

Saul's encounter with Christ on the Damascus Road was a part of that *“great reversal.”* So was the three years he spent in the desert preparing for ministry ahead.

Paul's life was so revolutionized by Christ that he considered everything attached to his former life as refuse. No wonder Paul changed his name from Saul to Paul. His was a brand-new life, wholly transformed by Jesus. In effect, what Paul did, with the help of Christ, was get rid of all the refuse in his life. He shed himself of everything that kept him from following Jesus.

During my years at St. Paul, there was a fellow there who owned the franchise for *1 800 Got Junk* here in Louisville and Southern Indiana. He worked hard at building that business and after a few years sold it. You know *1 800 Got Junk*. *"All you have to do is point and it's gone."*

When it came to Paul the former things of his life were gone as well. He had torn up his resume and began to work on a new one that included Jesus, first and foremost.

What refuse do you need to get rid of? What stands in the way of you following Jesus as a matter of first order?

Paul writes, *"I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead."* (Philippians 3:10-11)

Paul was willing to go to the mat for Jesus, knowing that the eternal reward of being with Christ for all eternity was always the endgame.

Paul writes just earlier in Philippians, *"For me to live is Christ and to die is gain."* (Philippians 1:21) He not only believed that but lived it as well. *"I want to know Christ,"* he said.

How is that playing out for you? Are you passionate about knowing Christ? Is he a matter of first order?

Pressing On

There is no doubt that Paul was a sports fan. It wasn't a religion for him, like it is for some today, but he sure liked sports, particularly Track and Field. Paul uses way too many track analogies for us to think otherwise and uses one of them in our passage for today. He writes, *"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me."* (Philippians 3:12)

The image here is of a runner straining for the finish line. Every bit of energy is used getting over the finish line.

I was inspired by the recent World Track and Field Championships and just how disciplined and dedicated those who participated are to the sport. Paul was a lot like that when it came to his relationship with Jesus. When it came to his relationship with Jesus, Paul displayed an undying discipline and a deep dedication. He would not be denied when it came to following Jesus.

We have been challenging ourselves with questions all day, so let me add another. When it comes to your relationship with Jesus, how is undying discipline and deep dedication playing out in your life? Are you just shuffling along or are you resolute in following Jesus? It all comes down to what you consider important.

You have heard me ask these questions before. They are the same questions that are asked right out of the gate at the start of the Walk to Emmaus.

- How do you spend your time?
- And how do you spend your money?

These two go a long way toward defining what you really think is important. As we mention so often, you and I are drawn in so many ways it is hard to keep our focus.

I love the story told of the fellow caught on video looking at his cell phone when just behind him a humpback whale was coming out of the water. The whole thing passed him by and he never for a second looked up. The man was there to watch for the whales, but alas his attention was on other things. He had missed what he set out to do. What an important image.

We focus on things that matter little while truly important things go unattended.

Focused on the Prize

In writing to the Philippian Church Paul was transparent in admitting that he had a way to go with all this, but don't we all? Let's face it we all have a way to go when it comes to truly following Christ.

- There will missteps along the way.
- There will be stops and starts.
- There will even be outright failures.

Christ though wants us to carry on. For Paul, his goal was Christ's goal for him, and the same is true for us. Paul writes, *"Not that I have already obtained this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.*

Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:12-14)

Ours is to follow Jesus, day by day, all with our eye toward heaven. When we keep our eye toward heaven the journey of this life is so much more doable. We find ourselves truly making a difference because the eternal truth of Christ's death and resurrection is informing our lives. It is always good to keep our final reward on mind and heart.

I ran in a race some years ago while visiting some friends. It was not a big race, nor was it very long. I remember just as the race started a couple of guys got out of their car and prepared to run. It was clear they were from Africa and fit as a fiddle. There was some prize money attached this race and they were there to claim it. They would not be denied. They kept their eye on the prize, and I am quick to tell you they won it.

Cheryl ran in the Old Ham Half Marathon a few weeks back and won her age group. Her prize was a ham.

Passionate Desire Undying Discipline Deep Dedication

I was excited to hear about the boys from North Oldham winning the state 4x400. What a big deal. I will often sit with my mom on the porch at the Beehive just across from the high school track and watch the kids do their things. They have a deep desire to stay at it. They are disciplined in what they do. And over the top when it comes to dedication.

May the same be said of us when it comes to following Jesus. Then and only then will we find ourselves making a difference in his name.

God bless us all.