Philippians 4:8-9  **Do it Again**  February 11, 2024

M. Craig Barnes

The Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill

None of us can stand the thought that we are just taking up room on the planet. Our souls yearn to believe we were created for a purpose, and we want to know what that purpose is—even if it keeps changing along the way.

Sometimes we talk about this as our calling, mission, or our legacy in life.

The Epistle to the Philippians is all about calling. It was written by the Apostle Paul who had a great purpose of taking the Good News of Jesus Christ to every city he could. Along the way, he fought for the adoption of the Gentiles into the covenant, creating the foundation of an inclusive church. He saw visions, preached to the powerful and lowly, and survived an ecclesiastical trial. He endured shipwrecks, stoning, and imprisonment. And he wrote some of the theology that has guided the church for over two thousand years. He’s now at the end of his life, in jail again, and he has had time to think about his legacy. In chapter three he gives us the testimony of his life, in which he first describes his pedigree and all of his achievements, and then says he counts it all as rubbish compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus his Lord. Then in our text today in chapter four he moves to his big conclusion. And what are Paul’s last words about calling, purpose, and legacy?

“Keep on doing whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, whatever is commendable, and the God of peace will be with you.”

Paul was not impressed by anything he had done, either before or after meeting Christ, and he didn’t think God was either. That’s because Paul believes we are not called to be impressive but faithful. God loves routine acts of faithfulness. That’s what Paul wants to tell us at the end of his life about our calling and legacy. “Keep on doing whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, and whatever is commendable.” Do it again, and again.

Have you ever swung a small child up over your head? The child squeals with fear and delight. But when you put the child down, what does that kid always say? “Do it again.” So you do it again, and what do you hear? “Do it again.” You do this a half dozen times before it occurs to you this kid is going to last a lot longer than you. Why do small children keep saying, “Do it again?” I think it’s because they’re made in the image of God who loves routine. GK Chesterton wrote that the sun rises every morning, not just because of natural laws but because each new day God squeals with delight and says, “Do it again.”

Who do you think created routine? Whether it is electrons revolving around their nucleus or planets revolving around their star, if any of them stop their faithful routines we are all in big trouble. Nature’s routines are all an act of praise to the Creator. Winter…Spring…Summer…Fall…. Winter…Spring…Summer…Fall…..Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

The same is true of your life. You wake up, get your coffee, and jump in the shower. If you have kids you get them up, make breakfast, and off everyone goes. You head to the same workplace day after day—even if that is in your house. Maybe along the way you drop off the dog at the vet. You have the same meetings that go on forever and accomplish little. Along the way you call the vet to check on the dog, and keep asking, “That costs how much?” At the end of the day you fight the traffic to get home, stop by the grocery to get something for dinner, and then pick up one kid from soccer practice and another from piano lessons. You get home, put the groceries on the counter and someone says, “Where’s the dog?” You rush back to the vet, get the dog, and make supper because the kids expect to eat every day. You help with homework, break up a fight, get some baths done, read a story. Then you pay some bills, work on your presentation for tomorrow, and try again to fix the leaky faucet. You call your mother who says, “Honey, I don’t think your taking care of yourself.” You try to read another chapter of the book everyone is talking about before falling into bed exhausted. The next morning, a delighted God greets you to say, “Do it again.”

Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Really? Yes. The real question is are we seeing the blessings that flow through our ordinary routines? And did we see that our high calling was just to keep doing whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, and commendable? And to do it again and again.

I once had an electrocardiogram done on my heart. The technician put a paddle on my chest, and I saw the inside of my heart, *my heart,* on the monitor. When she got to the heart valve, she stayed there a moment and I witnessed it keep opening and closing, opening and closing, opening and closing. It never gets a rest. It never takes a day off or goes on vacation. It can’t even come to church unless you bring it. It just keeps the same faithful routine of opening and closing, opening and closing. Then it hit me that the difference in life and death for me is that this valve remains faithful. So, I started rooting for it—“Do it again.”

Most of you didn’t wake up this morning hoping your heart valves were still working. Nah, you took that for granted. But a faithful heart valve is a blessing. Just ask those with bad hearts. Those who are fed up with the huge demands of the small children you tote around in a minivan, may want to talk to those who don’t need a minivan because they can’t have children. Those who are bored with their jobs may want to speak with someone unemployed, who would love your boring job. And those who are dissatisfied with the conditions or their house or the services of their retirement facility, may need to spend a little time offering food to the homeless to realize that having shelter on a cold night is a blessing.

My point today is simple—most of God’s blessings are buried beneath the veneer of the ordinary. So don’t let the routine blind you to the holiness that is breaking through every day. Again, and again. But my point is also that we are made in the image of this God who is a giver, and who calls us to be givers.

“If there is any excellence,” Paul concludes, “Think on these things.” Few of us would say that our goal is to be an excellent taker. Few want their legacy to be that they were locusts, consuming everything and everyone around them. But we become that when we spend too much time thinking about the wrong things, things that scare us and make us believe we are on our own in life. Notice that Paul does not say, “Whatever is frightening, whatever is resentful, whatever is lonely, whatever is hurtful, …think on these things.” That’s because he’s learned that if you brood over that stuff, you will inevitably find yourself taking what you can from the world to secure your life. As if that is possible. But those who think on whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, and commendable, cannot help but excel in giving themselves to these virtues.

According to the Apostle Paul, this is what it looks like to live in Christ, or to be a Christ-ian. And it is how the God of Peace changes the world—as we keep doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly.

When I was a boy, I used to love to listen to the stories of my Uncle Ed who was on a battleship in the Pacific during WWII. More than once he was on deck as the shipped was gunned or bombed. He even saw a Kamikaze pilot fly his plane into their ship. When I would hear these stories, I kept asking, “How did you keep from being afraid?” He kept responding, “I just did what I was trained to do.” Well, there it is.

This is why we worship—to train our hearts and minds. That is how we avoid being captives to fear, and it is how we can see holiness of our ordinary lives. And then we can see that our holy calling in Christ Jesus was never more, or less, than to just keep on doing whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, and commendable. And the God of peace will break into the world. Amen.