

This past weekend I spent some time with 27 people who are actively looking for God’s purpose in their lives. They came to spend two days at a retreat to further discern where God is calling them to serve. What struck me about these 27 people is that they are all so different. They were different ages, different ethnicities, some were on their second career and some have just completed one semester of college.

Last week we talked about Christ’s call to Andrew and Peter to come and see. These people were doing just that, but they did not want to leave the retreat without knowing God’s purpose for their lives.

What is interesting is that we who sit in this place of worship today are no different than these future pastors and missionaries. We are all looking for purpose in our lives.

We yearn for purpose because in life we can find ourselves constantly changing roles. For instance, perhaps you are a parent, and now your children are of at college and you are an empty nester. You are still a mother or father, but now find yourself in a new chapter of life.

Perhaps you now find yourself in a care-giving situation where you are taking care of a family member or loved one. Or maybe you are the one being cared for. Maybe you have recently experienced an illness or lost a loved one and it is now hard to see how to live life the way you used to know it.

In the changes of life, we all struggle to find God’s purpose. We ask God, “Who am I now, and who are you calling me to be?”

So often when we take care of others, we lose ourselves. God, through the Holy Spirit is beckoning us each day to live into the people God is calling us to be for God’s holy purpose.

Today we start a new six-week sermon series as we ask God to reveal God’s purpose for our lives through looking at the life and ministry of the apostle Paul.

When we meet Saul in the Bible, we see that his life has one purpose: to persecute Christians. In “Which Way Lord?” by Rob Fuquay we learn that “Saul’s purpose grew out of intellect and knowledge of scripture, his certainty of what God wanted from him and, above all, of following the letter of the law.”ⁱ Saul thought that people who followed Jesus were breaking God’s law. He did not understand that Jesus had come to be the fulfillment of the law.

In our Scripture for today from John one we hear: “In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God” (John 1:1). Here we see evidence that Jesus was the living, breathing word of God. Jesus was the fulfillment of God’s law and the extension of God’s covenant from the Old Testament now outstretched to all people who believed in Jesus Christ.

Saul thought he was doing the right thing, and it was not until he was confronted by the resurrected Christ on the way to Damascus that he understood that the new letter of the law was God’s grace through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We are going to take these next six weeks to see the amazing transformation of Saul to Paul, remembering that we too can be transformed and that we too have purpose.

So often in life we can only see part of the picture. Just as our bulletin cover today has a half-colored picture, so often we only see what is directly in front of us. But God sees the whole picture, God knows us better than we know ourselves and God desires that we immediately accept the fact that we are all created for a holy purpose.

One of my favorite verses in the Bible is Jeremiah 29:11: “For I know the plans I have for you says that Lord, to give you a future with hope.”

In order to accept God’s purpose for our lives, we have to begin with the starting point of hope. God created each and every one of us to bring glory to God our Creator, that means God did not make a mistake with us, in other words, “God doesn’t make no junk.”

Our lives immediately have value because we are creations of the Creator. Once we believe this truth deep within our souls we can continue to explore God’s purpose for our lives. The important thing for us to remember about God’s purpose is that God may call us to do many different things at many different times instead of just one thing.

As we watch the life of the Apostle Paul, we see how over time he adapted his gifts to serve the various churches he met. Like Jesus Christ who spent 40 days in the wilderness, Paul spent time in solitude before he became a missionary.

In fact, through his own account to the Galatians, he refers to spending as much as 17 years in private before sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.ⁱⁱ He even spent 15 days with Peter, hearing about his first-hand experience of Jesus Christ.ⁱⁱⁱ Scholars believe that during this time Paul spent time “praying, meditating, studying, talking, listening and growing..”^{iv} During this time Paul realized that as Fuquay shares: “Living with purpose means living with the constant affirmation that we belong to God and meant to enjoy God’s company.”^v

In our verse for today from Ephesians Paul shares his revelation: “It’s in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for” (Ephesians 1:1, The Message). Our starting point is Jesus Christ.

Once we realize our starting point, we next have to surrender our lives to God’s will. The thing about pursuing God’s purpose is we must be prepared for God to call us at any time to do the work of the Lord.

We have to be able to recognize that Christ’s calling us to serve. We do this when we see our lives through the lens of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection.

As we start this new year together, I would like us all to work on something: a personal mission statement that will help us further determine God’s purpose for our lives this year. Here are three things for us to consider as led by Rob Fuquay: (Below is a section from Rob Fuquay’s book: “Which Way Lord?” P. 28

- 1) Make sure your mission statement is in keeping with the purposes of God and the character of Christ...Who do you believe God calls you to be?
- 2) Make it more about other people than yourself. A purpose that focuses solely on your happiness or success...can set you up for disappointment. What positive impact can you make and bring to others?
- 3) Don’t limit your purpose to a specific role or location. Can you carry out your purpose until the day you die?

Jesus gave the disciples a mission statement: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...” (Matthew 28:19).

Our Virginia Bishop issued a mission statement to us in her episcopal address: to be “Disciples of Jesus Christ who are lifelong learners who influence others to serve.”^{vi}

My personal mission statement is to “share the good news of Jesus Christ so that all may know there is hope and grace available to them now.”

So now it’s your turn. Today I have given you an index card. I want you to take it home with you this week and bring it back next week. As you are working on your personal mission statement think about the ways that you would like to live out your personal relationship with God. What are the things you do that bring you life and spiritual renewal? What are the ways in which you feel called to help others?

I am excited to read the ways in which God is preparing you to serve God’s purpose in the world.

The good news for our lives today is that through our faith in Jesus Christ, transformation is possible.

When we truly believe that Jesus is the word of God, the fulfillment of the Old Testament, we can see that we too have been invited into God’s covenant. When we are baptized we share our purpose in the world, that through our faith in Jesus Christ we are called to “resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever way they present themselves” (UMH P. 32).

How can we live out that purpose here in Rappahanock county? What are the ways in which we can serve one another and our community? How can we continue to grow in faith through being in this community of love?

God’s purpose in the world is to bring hope and to foster peace. This purpose is powerful because it changes and saves lives.

The most amazing part of the weekend that I experienced with these 27 people was when in vulnerability they shared their stories. They shared how they had come to a point in their lives where they didn’t know which way to go, their own way or God’s way.

For many of them they had fought against God’s calling in their lives for many years for various reasons. But when they finally accepted that they had been called for a specific purpose their lives were changed and blessed.

No longer were they running from God but working hand and hand with God. No longer did they feel guilty for not doing the things God called them to do. They were now filled with joy and a renewed sense of purpose.

We too can experience that joy today.

As Christians we know that embodying our faith is not easy. In fact, it can be really difficult. We know that the Apostle Paul suffered many times all for the glory of God.

We are not promised an easy life, but we are promised a life full of hope. Our joy today comes from knowing that God created us for a purpose, to emulate the love of God. We each do that in different ways with different people.

My hope for all of us today is that we can clearly discern what God is calling us to do next and what God is calling us to do together. And may we answer God’s calling with a resounding yes! In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Endnotes

ⁱ Rob Fuquay. “Which Way Lord?” Upper Room Books. 2017. P. 11.

ⁱⁱ Ibid, 21.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} Ibid, 25.

^v Ibid, 26.

^{vi} https://www.vaumc.org/pages/news/2018vanews/2018vanews_visionupdate