

Throughout history people have overcome insurmountable odds in order to do the things they had been created to do. Franklin Roosevelt became partly paralyzed due to polio at age 39 and he went on to be one of the greatest presidents of our time serving the longest tenure in presidential history. Ludwig Van Beethoven started playing piano professionally at age six, but in the prime of his composition years he began losing his hearing. It was when deafness occurred for Beethoven that he wrote his greatest works. The music was inside him and has shaped our culture and world.

Bill Gates first business failed... imagine what the world would have missed if he would have given up. Oprah Winfrey had a difficult childhood, but she rose above it, worked hard, and now uses her wealth to help many other people. Bethany Hamilton was on top of the world, when at 13 she was taking the surfing world by storm. Then one-night tragedy struck when a shark bit off her arm. She got back on her surfboard a month later and two years later one first place in the most prestigious surfing contest for women.

There is one thing all these people have in common. Perseverance of the human spirit. One of the most beautiful gifts that God gave us upon creation was free will. We are called to use this gift to glorify God with our lives. We honor God with our free will when we choose not to give up when things become difficult.

In our Scripture for today from the Gospel of Matthew we see Jesus giving his disciples a pep talk before sending them out to do mission and ministry in His name. Jesus does not sugar coat the work they are doing to do. He says they will not experience all rainbow and butterflies but tells them there may be people who will not accept them.

When this happens, Jesus instructs them to “shake off the dust from [their] feet as [they] leave that house or town” (Matthew 10:14). Then he reiterates his point: “Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgement than for that town” (Matthew 10:15).

Church this work that we do of making disciples for the glory of God is not easy, but it is beautiful.

As we continue to journey with the Apostle Paul in week three of this six-week sermon series we remember that Paul certainly knew what it was like to face adversity.

You see, the Apostle Paul first went to serve in a place that did not like him.

People did not really believe that he was now in ministry for Jesus Christ, when shortly before he had a hand in the stoning of Stephen, a disciple of Christ. By the grace of God, God gave him someone to help him and that man was named Barnabas.

In “Which Way, Lord” Rob Fuquay shares: “When the apostles refuse to meet with Paul, thinking his change in direction is a sham, Barnabas convinces them otherwise. When Jewish leaders in Jerusalem try to kill Paul for his conversion, Barnabas is among a group that puts Paul on a boat and sends him back to Tarsus. When...Barnabas again begins serving as a leader of a thriving Christian community in Antioch of Syria, he knows who can help him. And so, he extends the fateful invitation that finally launches Paul into ministry.”ⁱ

I think this is why Jesus sent the disciples out in pairs, Christ knew we would need each other on this journey.

I wonder today who has been a Barnabas in your life? Who is the person who helped you realize what God was calling you to do?

It was such a blessing for me this past week to read all your personal mission statements. One person wrote: “To continue to reach out to those in need.” Another wrote: “To help one person in any way needed.” Another wrote: “To be more loving to everyone.” Other responses included: “To be a mentor to young people, who feel lost and alone,” “To be patient,” “To serve God and this community through healing...” “To do nursing home ministry,” and one of my favorites: “To more visibly and consistently model Jesus’ goodness and forgiveness and charity and to resist the crankiness that comes with advanced age.”

These mission statements were inspiring and truly let me see your hearts for helping other people. As we move forward together, I think we should look into helping the youth of our community, getting more involved in the Food Pantry, and visiting Nursing Homes at least every other month.

God has so many plans in store for us and I am so excited to be in ministry alongside you.

As we try some new things God reminds us that what we are required to offer the Lord is “to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with [our] God?” (Micah 6:8).

As we do what God has asked us to do, we must know that we will face adversity. This is a certainty. There will be times we will we try something new and it will flop. There will be times when we are discouraged that our church is not growing or that attendance may be down on a Sunday, but that does not mean that we give up.

God is not done with us on the Rappahannock Charge.

We do justice together as we participate in opportunities in the community to help those who are vulnerable. We will be doing My Brother’s Table again this year on March 5 at Front Royal Presbyterian Church where we get to set down at the same table with those who are homeless.

We do justice when we speak up for those who cannot speak up for themselves. We do this as we are advocates for our family and friends when they go through health difficulties. We do this when we show up for someone who has no one else to show up for them.

We love kindness for God when we choose forgiveness over anger. Many of your mission statements included forgiving others and offering patience to others. We love kindness when we invite someone to church into this beautiful community of welcome. We do this when we fully offer our presence to those who are sharing their hearts with us.

We walk humbly with God when we follow the teachings of Jesus. In Matthew 10 Jesus told the disciples to take nothing with them. For they had everything they needed. Jesus had prepared them before they were sent out.

So also, Jesus has prepared us to serve. One is never fully ready to do the work of God, but time and time again God equips those who are called to serve.

God used Moses, a man with a speech impediment to share God’s words of hope to the Israelites. God chose David, the youngest son of Jesse to defeat Goliath. God chose Mary, a 13 year old girl to bear the Christ-child and God chose Paul, a Pharisee to share the good news of Christ with all who would hear it.

God is also calling us to serve. We sit today in mission central, the place we are equipped to go out and embody the good news of Jesus Christ. Then we leave these walls and share our gifts of God with the world. So, what are we waiting for?

If I have learned anything in ministry, it is that we should always say yes to God because God will keep asking us to do that thing God has asked us to do.

This past week I sat in interview after interview with those who have been called to be ordained pastors. One interview was particularly moving. This candidate had not passed our committee the previous year, but she had passed all her other committees. She had only been asked to return to our committee and when the interview began she said something profound.

When asked what she had learned from this past year she said, “I learned that I was trusting more in myself than in God. This year I learned to trust in God.”

This is what we are learning all the time. This is why we have communion each month and we surrender our lives again to Jesus Christ through our prayer of confession.

At Christ’s table we are invited to all sit down together, sinners and saints, the poor and the wealthy, those who know what God has called them to do and those who are still figuring it out.

At Christ’s table we are welcomed. At Christ’s table we experience the grace of God, this spiritual nourishment, then we are sent out to serve.

As you approach the communion table today, I do invite you to let go of all the things that have been weighing you down this week. Maybe you have been facing adversity. Perhaps you feel that you are being persecuted by your friends, family, boss, or co-workers. Maybe you are going through a health crisis or you have become a caregiver for a family member. Perhaps you are experiencing adversity in your faith and you feel like you are not connecting with God.

Whatever adversity you may have experienced this week, give it to the Lord. The One who continues to call us, equip us, and send us out.

My prayer for each of us is that we know that God has a mission for each and every one of us. We may be assigned short term missions like the prophets, or long-term missions like the Apostle Paul and the disciples, but God is calling all of us to serve.

May we not be discouraged by the real or perceived failures in our lives, and may we encourage others who are having a hard time.

May we continue to go out two by two to do the work of the Lord. **The good news for our lives today is that God is not done with us yet.** Thanks be to God. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Endnotes

ⁱ Rob Fuquay. “Which Way, Lord?” Upper Room Books. Nashville, TN. 2017. P. 54.

Additional Resources

Keck et al. “The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible.” Vol. VIII. Abingdon Press. Nashville, TN. 1995.

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/successful-people-obstacles_n_3964459