

Your MINISTRY Matters - January 5, 2020

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Today as we begin the new year, I want to talk about purpose and ministry. We all want this year to be a good one, right? We want to make a difference for good, do we not? *Some of you are just wanting to get Christmas decorations put away today.* That's ok, you gotta start somewhere. I want you to know that for many of you, what you do and have done in serving others, they are worth it. And for some of you what you are going to commit to doing, it's worth it.

This morning I want to consider one particular verse in the Bible. It's our key verse for today and then I want to look at what's going on around it. It is 1 Corinthians 15:58, **Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.**

It's an awesome verse, don't you think? Some of you seem unconvinced... *Well, in another twenty minutes, I'll have you all convinced, if for no other reason than you want me to stop talking.*

Now because this verse starts with a "therefore" we need to ask, "what is the therefore there for?" That's actually an important question for biblical study, "What is the therefore there for?"

Well, earlier in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul, who penned this verse, is trying to convince his audience that because Jesus was resurrected from the dead, all human beings, every last one of them, will be resurrected.

In 1 Corinthians 15:51-53 we read, **But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed. For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies.** 1 Corinthians 15:51-53 (NLT)

OK, a quick side note: *Today in 2020, what do you think many people in Newton, Hesston and Wichita think will happen to them when they die?* They might say go to heaven, they're unsure, or just die.

Many people throughout history have thought *poof* their candle of life goes out and then suddenly they cease to exist. They believe there's no resurrection on the other side. There are no rewards. There are no consequences. There's just nothingness: eternal, unconscious nothingness.

Now while some people may believe that today, that was the prevailing belief in Paul's day. To that belief, Paul says

in 1 Corinthians 15:20, **But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead,...** And then Paul uses a very interesting phrase, **...the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.**

The first fruits idea is that if you have a field of corn and it's almost ready to be harvested, you go out and you search and you find the one ear of corn that might be ready one day earlier than the rest of the crop. You pick it, and it's your first fruit. And then you smile, knowing that there's a whole field that's coming tomorrow and the next day, that's going to look just like the first fruit. It's a prototype with lots to follow. *Did I get that right, farmers?*

So Paul says that Christ's resurrection is the first fruit, meaning that because Jesus was resurrected from the dead, there's now a whole crop, a whole field of people, who will be resurrected in like manner. A conscious, bodily resurrection. And Paul makes a big point about this. Part of the reason that Paul is hammering away in 1 Corinthians 15 about the reality of the physical resurrection is because most of his listeners still believed in the 'candle goes out' theory of death.

If you follow that theory through to its logical conclusion, its results are breathtaking, because, in short, life seems to lose its meaning all together. Think about what Paul is saying. Paul says, "Please think, if no one is resurrected after death, why does anything in this life matter at all?" Then **...If the dead are not raised**, he quotes some secular

thinking here, **“Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”** 1 Corinthians 15:32 (NIV)

Do you see Paul’s argument? If there is no resurrection, then the modern day terrorist who kills and maims, his candle goes out and there’s eternal nothingness. His candle goes out just the same as Mother Teresa’s candle when she died after seventy years of serving the poor. It all goes into unconscious nothingness forever.

To this Paul says, *“Not on your life!”* 1 Corinthians 15:58, **“Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”**

Not in vain. Because Jesus is the first fruit, we and others will be the full harvest. That’s exciting! I want resurrection, not nothingness. I think Paul is saying here is what we do in life counts. It matters. Paul wants us to live with confidence for Jesus today in light of our future resurrection. What we do today matters. We love God and it matters. We love our neighbors and it matters.

Since Paul is saying what we do in life matters, there’s an important question we need to ask, *“What is God asking me to do?”* I’ve titled this sermon *Your Ministry Matters* and want the word ministry to mean not just what you do at church for the church or for the church building, but whatever you do for Jesus by serving others.

The Bible says, “Do all things to the glory of God.” And that’s what this sermon is about. I believe a Christian can assess their talent, their joy, their passion, and find their ministry wherever God leads them. And because this is so important, let’s consider,

HOW TO MAKE AN IMPACT THROUGH SERVING?

1. Commit Don’t be wishy washy. Our key verse says, “...stand firm. Let nothing move you.” *That’s commitment!*

Why is Paul saying this? Do you realize that it is easy to become flakey? Many people don’t make this commitment to serving others. Let me say, this sermon is not about guilting you into volunteering more at church. Let’s get rid of the word MORE this year when it comes to ministry. Let’s commit to our best, but more isn’t always what’s best.

Individually, your ministry may at times be simply where you see a need that you can help with. That’s great. When someone replaces a burned out lightbulb in our church, it probably wasn’t fulfilling their life calling, but they saw a need they could fulfill and they did it. Thank you. 1 Corinthians 10:31, **Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.** Thank you.

Maybe you’re not ready to commit to a ministry though, because you know life is pretty good in this part of Kansas and it would be so convenient, if you could stop caring about the condition of the people and world around you.

We can get sucked into an idea that *“It’s all going to come out in the wash”*. It’s all going to work out in the end and so there’s nothing really at stake here in our community, so people say, “Why get all hot and bothered?” But the reality is “your ministry matters”, because the people around you matter.

When you consider serving others know that you’re serving people who matter to our Father in heaven who created them and loves them. That is the truest thing about humanity, so when you serve you also need to...

2. Bring Your Best It’s blindingly clear Paul’s marching orders for life, **Always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord.**

He doesn’t say: *“Hey, if you ever get around to it in your otherwise busy life and if it’s ever convenient for you, if you have absolutely nothing else you feel like doing, throw a bone in God’s direction and do a little of His work.”* It doesn’t say that. He doesn’t say, *“Hey, dabble in the work of the Lord periodically.”* It doesn’t say, *“Get intense every once in a while about God’s purposes in this world.”*

In actuality, Paul sets the bar about as high as a bar can be set. He says, *“Always, always, abound in the work of the Lord. Everyday, move His work of love and forgiveness forward in the world. Intentionally. Passionately. Generously.”*

Consider Peter's instructions, **Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others.** 1 Pet. 4:10 (NIV) He didn't say, *"Copy what others do well and therefore think you're supposed to do that too."* He said, *"Use your gifts,"* **"whatever gift you have received to serve others"** and I think he's also saying, *"Don't judge others by the gifts you wish they had."* Let them find their ministry with these same questions.

Now then, if you're ready to commit and bring your best,
How Do You Determine Your Place in Ministry?

Before we get to my third point, I'd like to break out five points to help us determine our place in ministry. This is ministry inside or outside the church. It's serving others in your workplace, in your retirement, and in your neighborhood. It's always looking for the good God is doing and encouraging that.

If you're ready to find your ministry, I think it'll be a good fit and you'll feel fulfilled doing it, if you first Ask These Five Questions.

A. What do I enjoy?

Do not serve in something you hate. And do not prescribe someone else's ministry gift on yourself or on others. Some of you need permission to quit a ministry in order to change to another one. The Apostle Peter gives you permission. **"Use whatever gift YOU have received."**

So what do you enjoy? See that's an important question, because it's about how God made you. While some Christians serve out of obligation and guilt, you were made with certain gifts, so what do you enjoy.

If you serve primarily because of guilt, then watch out, you may end up becoming mean and stingy. That's probably why waiters hate the after church crowd on Sundays, because so many people who are leaving churches that have laid on the guilt factor in their service. If that's you, I give you permission to quit what you hate.

But then ask, **“What do I enjoy?”** A friend once said, “The best evidence that there is a God in heaven, is that there are people with joy.” What brings you joy? If your ministry makes you bitter, not joyful, if you don't love the work you're doing, you can quit, but before you quit something because it's difficult, instead, alongside **“What do I enjoy?”** ask this question...

B. What do I do well?

Now when I said, “What do I do well?” some of you thought, *“Nothing.”* When you say you do nothing well, you are thumbing your nose at God. You have been given a Spiritual Gift by God, for the purpose of serving others. Use that gift to serve others.

It says in Romans 12:3, ...**Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us.**

-Some of you are organizers, you have color-coated calendars. If someone asked you to “organize their pantry”, you would love it.

-Some of you are creative. You bring joy to us with your ideas and creations. Your portraits, your quilts, your hospitality.

-Some of you are good at visiting people in the hospital, you have the gift of mercy. You come alongside people.

These shouldn't be evaluated based on whether they make you any money, that's not necessary for enjoying life. My parents used to say when I was young, *“Do what you enjoy and hopefully you can get paid for it.”* I think in our economy that makes sense. Don't limit your enjoyment of your gifts and service to others by whether you get paid for them. Every person has been given a gift by God to be used for serving others inside and outside the local church. This may bring us income sometimes, but this can bring us joy all the time.

What do you enjoy and *what do you do well?* Now both questions need to be answered because some people enjoy things that they do not do well.

And then another good question is...

C. What bothers me?

I am not talking about being bothered by people who forget to use their turn signal or cut in line in front of you. I have talked about the theologian Popeye the Sailor Man before. Do you remember one of his phrases? What does he say towards the end of each episode? *"I've had all I can stands and I can stands no more."*

Every person who follows Jesus needs to have that moment. Mother Teresa went to Calcutta, India as a young woman and she was bothered by what she saw. You may have heard the story of Mother Teresa, she was washing the wounds of a leper and a tourist goes by and said, *"I would not do that for a million dollars."* And she said, *"Neither would I."*

Why? Because when you're doing what God is calling you to do, it is not about how much you make, but what difference you are making.

You know some people will call the church when they get a passion and say the church should do something about it. But here is the truth: *You cannot delegate your burden.* Your passion is not my responsibility. And it's not yours to delegate. You have been gifted for it, so if there's an opportunity, go for it.

If God has called you to do something about a need, He has not called you to just hit FWD on your email to inform others. Or just to repost it on Facebook. He has likely put

it on your heart, to do something, to get your hands dirty, and to do it well.

That leads to another important question is...

D. What opportunities are available now?

If you are not faithful with what is now, you will not know what is next. By the way spiritual gifts are huge. Find out what you are good at and what you are not. Find out what brings you joy and what brings you angst, and where God's passion aligns with your passion.

In the context of our church, my prayer more than anything else is that you will get the big picture that we are doing church together, so that we can be fully equipped, fully ALIVE for the passion God has given us. Find out what brings you joy and what brings you angst and where God's passion aligns with your passion.

If we are faithful with what is now, our Father is equipping us for what is next. But see if you delegate your calling to someone else, if you sign up for a ministry, because you guilted yourself into it, then you might just answer the question, *What bothers me?* with "*The Church bothers me.*"

If that's you, I say go back to 1 and 2. **"What do I enjoy?"** and **"What do I do well?"** Your ministry long term will come from those, because that's how God has

made you to have the fullness of life. That's where your relationship with our Father will come alive.

Ever notice as you get older when you do something the way your father or mother did it? When it's one of our parents that is now in heaven, it gives us a connection with them, doesn't it? I loved the way I flipped an egg in a frying pan one day and as I did, I could just see my Dad in my parents' kitchen flipping an egg the exact same way. When you do what you enjoy and do it well, you're imaging your Father in Heaven who gave you that gift and loves you.

But then for those still not ready to offer your gifts in serving others, the real question is this...

E. Who am I going to live for?

Some of you may feel like from a human perspective what you have to offer doesn't count much and will never be very visible or very dramatic. Then I say to you, "*Get involved.*"

The leadership of First Presbyterian has had some goals we've been working on for the past year and we're starting to see how they nuance the ministries we do. Here are the goals, you can join in with us: **Connect people, reduce loneliness, bring people to know Jesus as Savior.**

See we've been given this abundance in America, in Kansas, in our cities, and in our church. We've been given this opportunity to utilize the abundance with purpose. When we see where it aligns with our joy, our gifts, our passion, and our love for Jesus, then we need to...

3. Know it Matters. *Your Ministry Matters*, I can't say it enough.

The final phrase of this verse says, "...**because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.** I don't know about you, but I hate stuff that is done in vain.

Here's a true story a friend told me. An excavator spent three days digging out a guy's backyard to install an in-ground swimming pool. When he got it all done perfectly, all dug out, ready for the pool company to come, the homeowner came back from vacation, saw the hole in the backyard, and said to the excavator, "*I didn't order a swimming pool. What address were you supposed to be digging this at?*"

Yup, he missed it by one house. It was supposed to be his neighbor's pool. He had dug that hole totally in vain. We don't like things done in vain, but every single effort expended to show we have a Father in heaven who loves and values us, no matter how big or how small the effort, how visible or how hidden, no matter who it is we're showing that love to, it's never done in vain. It is always noticed and appreciated by our Father. Every prayer

prayed. Every gift given. Every kind deed or act of service done in Jesus' Name. None of it is in vain and it makes a difference in the lives of people right here and right now.

The Bible says, **"There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works in all of them."** 1 Corinthians 12:4-6

These ministries we're called to ultimately speak to our purpose. I want you to know that whatever you do in service for others, it's worth it. My challenge for you is having answered these questions for yourself, then to take a step towards your ministry, designed specifically for you, not one size fits all, but for you, because knowing that will give you purpose. Paul says, **"be steadfast, be immovable, always abound in the work of the Lord, knowing that your work is never in vain if it is in the Lord."**