

## “This One Thing I Do”

World Communion Sunday - October 4, 2020

Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9 ~ Philippians 3:3-14 ~ Matthew 21:33-46

“This one thing I do,” Paul told his friends at Philippi ... “This one thing.” You have to admire that. Paul can be all over the place in his letters. Even in the early days, one of the brothers said of all his letters “There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures” (2 Peter 3:16). Paul could be convoluted in his reasoning and opaque in his pontifications ... caustic ... controversial ... confusing. But you have to give Paul this ... he knew what he was about. He had a clear vision of his mission in life.

I’ve never been too good at multi-tasking myself. When I was a child, I remember this juggler on the Ed Sullivan show who would balance plates on these thin poles way over his head by spinning them. He was amazing ...three, four, five ... everyone oohing and aahing. But he kept going until he had something like twenty plates up in the air and he was running all over the stage ... gasping for air ... keeping all those plates spinning. That’s me at times. Sometimes I feel like I have too many plates going at once and I get so strung out running back and forth that the plates start dropping. I want to do it all, but I feel overwhelmed and I can forget to do the important things. One Friday morning when we lived in WI, I got up early to take care of a long list of things. I went downstairs to put in a load of laundry ... ironed my blouse before heading out ... raced back up to check to see if we needed milk before I ran to the store ...rushed home to put the groceries away before I threw the clothes in the dryer and found that I had put the iron in the refrigerator. If you think that’s bad, ask John about the time he went down to the kitchen for a midnight snack and the next morning opened the refrigerator and found our cat in there.

But where I’m overextended and absent minded, Paul is single minded and focused, “This one thing I do.” One thing. One thing. One thing.

What is your one thing? What is your “mission in life?” Why do you suppose God put you here on this earth? There are several stages where this becomes a burning question. Young people decide what to study, and then change it two or three times in the course of their college years as dreams rise and fall. Young adults find a career, but then find they are bored or frustrated or feel no meaning in what they are doing so they begin to search for new directions. Some people are fabulously successful, reach all their goals, then find themselves wondering, is this all there is? Or, you spend most of your life just making ends meet ... getting along day by

day. You don't think much past the next few weeks or months or years. Before you know it, you reach a certain age ... or you have a health crisis ... or maybe you retire ... but one day you look up and Mortality smiles at you, tapping her watch. You realize you only have a limited amount of time left and suddenly questions of purpose ... and legacy ... and meaning matter more than ever before. Or maybe the question confronts you sooner because some nosy preacher makes you stop and think about it on a Sunday morning. Like today. I'm asking you, what is your mission in life? Why did God put you here on this earth? What will your life mean?

How do we even go about answering that question? In his book "What Color is Your Parachute?" Richard Bolles includes a helpful appendix on "Finding Your Mission in Life." He thinks what you do for a living should have some connection with what you do for a life. According to Bolles, your mission in life has three parts. He says your first mission, which everyone shares, is to seek to stand ... hour by hour ... in the conscious presence of God, the one from whom your mission is derived. He says your second mission, also shared by all, is to do what you can ... moment by moment ... day by day ... step by step ... to make this world a better place ... following the leading and guidance of God's Spirit within and around you. And he says your third mission, *which is uniquely yours*, is to exercise that talent which you particularly came to earth to use ... your greatest gift ... in the places or settings which God has caused to appeal to you the most ... and for those purposes which God most needs to have done in the world. It's another way of saying my favorite quote from Frederick Buechner... "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

Bolles emphasizes that this search is not a snap decision in a quick moment... but an ongoing life process. He insists it takes time and intentionality. He says it takes some learning and unlearning ... Paul would say "forgetting what lies behind" ... and a process of trial and error to flesh out all three parts of your mission in life. But, Bolles testifies, those who make the effort and keep to the task ... Paul would say "straining forward to what lies ahead" ... find a very special sense of joy which no one can take from them.

Paul has it right. As those who carry the name of Christ, we have one thing to do. One thing ... to know Christ and by doing so to make him known in the world. The doctrine of the incarnation ... that God was present in the flesh and blood of the human Jesus ... is recognition that we also embody God in the world. The Spirit of the living God operates through our own flesh and blood. Embodiment is our whole project. Embodiment is our destiny. Your mission in life is one thing ... to embody God's love to the people around you. It's as simple as that ... and as complex. It's a high calling.

But notice, Paul is writing to somebody else in this letter. We're not just reading his diary. This isn't just a few personal reflections that Paul scribbled when he was in prison near the end of his life in the hopes that someone might discover it someday and understand who he was. Paul is writing this to a group of people who know him and love him. Paul's mission in life is part of something which is greater than just Paul. I'm talking God here, which is as great as you can get. But even God does not accomplish what God wants through a single person. Ah, well, "but what about Jesus?" you say. Yes, but didn't Jesus call others to join him ... men and women ... families ... children ... a community carrying his name and completing his work? I mean, what can you accomplish all by yourself? I don't care what your mission in life is ... you're going to need some help. So, Paul is writing to a church ... a community of friends who share the same central mission that Paul has ... and he's asking them for help. That's what his letter to the Philippians is all about.

We all need some help to do anything ... to become anything that matters. God puts us in a family to begin with. You don't get to choose your family, and some of us are blessed or cursed by the family we're given ... though you can look at it the other way and see that your family was blessed or cursed with you. Beyond the family, though, you do get to choose the people with whom you associate ... the groups and firms ... the clubs and teams ... the parties and networks that share your values and magnify your contribution to the wider world.

To accomplish Jesus' mission, the church was established. The church is a spiritual family. Which means, along with brothers and sisters, you get some crazy aunts and uncles, some notorious cousins, and a few embarrassing distant relatives. Not to mention some cattle rustlers and cutthroats and lots of nuts in the family tree. Families are dysfunctional by nature, because they consist of flawed human beings and human beings are messy. And families are glorious because they are there when you need them.

Each of us can do some good things. But all of us together, co-operating, in unity, in harmony ... can do great things ... beautiful things ... the one thing that is everything. We were meant to fly! But we plod along and bump into each other instead. We get distracted. We get divided. We try to do too many other things. And I think that's why Jesus gave us this simple ritual ... to remember the main thing ... the one thing that he wants us to do ... to embody his love to the world together.

Today we celebrate World Communion Sunday. It is a recognition of our unity and of our mission in life, to embody Jesus Christ in the world. We are his hands and feet. We are his eyes and ears. We are his heart. We are his love. Sometimes we don't get it right. We have a lot to apologize for in the history of humankind ... some corporate sins to confess. Sometimes we've been hateful and exclusive instead of loving and embracing. We've been racist, sexist,

homophobic, anti-semitic, self-righteous, selfish, greedy, narrow-minded ... hard-hearted and small-souled ... an embodiment of the very sins which placed Jesus on the cross. But Jesus calls us to the table to remind us that we are forgiven ... that we are included ... that we are still called to a great and beautiful mission in life. We remember Jesus ... remember his body and blood ... and we remember each other.

When you receive communion, you should remember, "I'm somebody's child ... I am a child of God." When you receive communion, you should remember, "I'm somebody's brother. I'm somebody's sister. I'm part of a great family." When you come receive communion you should remember, "I have a mission in life, to be the body of Christ, to carry his love in my heart and words and actions to each person that I meet."

Our mission isn't to think the right things or believe the right things ... but to do the right things ... to love in ways that matter. So today, let's join the church around the world ...

"Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," as Paul writes elsewhere.

"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph 4:3-6).

And there is that one mission in life which we share ... to know Christ and to make him known by the places we go ... the things we say ... the things we do ... the groups we join ... the persons we become ... the people we become together in the grace of Jesus Christ our Lord. And it's a beautiful thing. So, beloved, with all our brothers and sisters, let us remember that when we receive the gifts from the table of our Lord. May we pray?

Savior we respond again today to your invitation to the table to your call to the mission. Thank you for including us. As we come today to remember your body and blood, make us your body and blood, your holy people called out and set aside to embody your love to all humankind in the name of Christ Jesus. Amen.