

From Keeping a List to Living a Life

Psalm 25:1-10
Mark 1:9-15

February 18, 2018
Faith Community

When I arrived here eleven months ago to serve as your interim pastor, I was amazed when I saw what you have going for you. On more than one occasion I've shared with you my 'awesome list,' a collection of advantages, assets, plusses, and all around cool parts of this place. There was something else, however, that upstaged all that. It was a spirit of concern, of dis-ease and general foreboding.

I heard how over the years life has gradually wound down around here. Membership, attendance, money and corresponding attitudes, outlook and hope for the future, all of it appeared to be headed the wrong way. I heard comments like, 'our best days are behind us, we had kids galore running around the place; there were two Sunday services to accommodate everyone.'

On the one hand I had my awesome list. On the other, well, it was a different story. Hence, the title for today's sermon is "From Keeping a List to Living a Life."

Something similar may have been going on in Jesus' world. Part of our New Testament reading has a reference to time. It was,

After John was put in prison.... (Mark 1:14)

This was the guy who had baptized Jesus at the beginning of it all, John the Baptist. His ministry was all about preparing the way, getting people ready for Jesus.

Jesus, for his part, said of him,

Among those born of women no one is greater than John. (Luke 7:28)

As the story continues we learn that not only had John been put in prison, he would die there at the hands of a corrupt king. It wasn't right. It wasn't fair. John was a hero for Jesus, and now he'd be gone.

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 14-5).

Two key words:

Repent.
Believe.

The Greek word for 'repent' is 'metanoia.' It means 'change.' It's where we get our word 'metamorphosis.' It's not just giving something up or turning away from something, it's also a turning towards something else. It means to think differently, to reconsider.

To believe means to entrust, commit, have moral conviction.

Repent.
Believe.

There's a one-two punch that changes everything.

His hero will die. Maybe the dream would die as well. Maybe *his* best days would be behind him. Jesus responds, however, by proclaiming good news.

Friends, we are not helpless. Our best days are behind us only if we say so. The opportunities that surround us are boundless. What do we need to change in order to make use of them? How do we need to repent and believe? Here's an example:

The last two Sundays have had pretty lousy weather, last week especially so. Just as with Christmas Eve and the bad weather then, I was pleasantly surprised at the size of the turnout. You are a hardy bunch.

Another surprise last week was the number of visitors here.

There was a young man with his four year old girl who came right down front for the children's time. He usually attends Westminster church in Detroit.

There was a young woman who's part of the Fort Street church, also in Detroit.

Those two were here because of the weather.

Then there was a father and his little boy. He had set a goal to attend 52 churches this year, and last week was our turn.

Finally we were privileged to have an entire family, Mom, Dad, two boys and a baby girl. The boys also came down for the children's time, and went to Sunday school as well.

Now for a question: if you were here last Sunday, how many of our visitors did you go out of your way to say hello to?

We're a small enough church that if we see an unfamiliar face, it should be second nature to say hello. Nothing fancy. No prepared speech. Just a smile and a hello. If you're led to do so, you can take it farther, but start with a smile and a hello. That may be all that's needed for a new life to take root.

There's something happening here that people need to know about and be a part of, don't you think? Otherwise, why bother? Life will be impoverished for those who miss out. Friends, that's the passion, the enthusiasm, the urgency with which you and I are to come together. There are people who are desperately searching for what you and I all too often take for granted. Maybe you know a few. Maybe you're one of them.

Don't you want to make a difference? Don't you want your life to count for something?

We have something that no other organization on the planet can claim. Without him, without Jesus, we're just another service club or community organization.

Instead, Imagine the freedom of being loved just the way you are, with nothing to prove.

Imagine people loving you enough to hold your feet to the fire in regards to your own personal growth and development.

What if prayer were not a familiar speech just before dinner but rather a relationship that molded and shaped you, giving form and direction to your everyday life?

What if you couldn't wait to make it to worship because it's the single most important thing you can be about?

Imagine the Bible being a field manual for what it means to become a mature person, offering a real alternative to a pointlessly self-centered culture that feeds on violence and scandal.

Imagine moving from a religion to a way of life that changes you and in turn changes the people around you and the world itself.

With all that was lining up against him, Jesus proclaimed good news. He called people to change at the deepest level and in turn to rise up to a level of God fueled moral courage that changes the world.

What will you do?