

The Key to Getting Ahead

Psalm 4
Luke 24:36-48

April 15, 2018
Faith Community

"There's never been a finer man or a better coach in American sports than John Wooden. He won 10 national basketball championships at UCLA. No one has ever come within six of him. He won 88 straight games between 1971 and 1974. No one has come within 42 of that since. . . .

"Of the 180 athletes who played for him, he knew the whereabouts of 172. Of course, it wasn't not hard when most of them called him, checking up on him.

"Discipline yourself, and others won't need to," Coach would say. 'Never lie, never cheat, never steal, and Earn the right to be proud and confident.'

"No UCLA basketball number was retired under his watch. 'What about the guys who wore that number before?' he'd say. 'Didn't they contribute to the team?'

"No long hair, no facial hair. 'They take too long to dry, and you could catch cold leaving the gym,' he'd say. That one drove his players nuts. One day, Bill Walton showed up with a full beard. 'It's my right,' he insisted. Wooden asked if he believed that strongly. Walton said he did. 'That's good, Bill,' Coach said. 'I admire people who have strong beliefs and stick by them, I really do. We're going to miss you.' Walton shaved it that very day. Over the years since then he called every week to tell Coach he loved him.

"There has never been another coach like Wooden, quiet as an April snow and square as a game of checkers, loyal to one woman, one school, one way, and walking around campus in his sensible shoes and Jimmy Stewart morals.

"Maybe one of the best examples of his priorities is what would happen on the first day of practice each season. He'd spend a half hour, 30 minutes, teaching his men how to put on a sock. 'Wrinkles can lead to blisters,' he'd say. Eventually, they'd do it right, and then he'd move to the other foot."¹

First day of practice. Every year. Even the veteran players. Back to the basics. Whatever else he might do, it was always back to the basics. And all he had to show for it

¹ Sports Illustrated

was and continues to be the best record in the history of college basketball.

If you look closely in Scripture you'll see that back to the basics is a constant theme. Moses had to constantly remind the Children of Israel as they wandered in the wilderness. The Old Testament Judges faced a never ending task, as did the prophets. Jesus himself is all about that.

Redirecting.
Refocusing.
Reminding.

Again and again, he would take them back.

Maybe it's a version of the twenty eight day rule: the mission and vision have to be repeated and reaffirmed every twenty eight days in order to avoid mission drift. It may be a degree or two at the beginning but, without regular monitoring and course correcting you'll get so off course that you won't know where you are or where you're going.

In the 24th chapter of Luke, the resurrected Christ appears to his astonished disciples, and offers them a familiar greeting:

Peace be with you, (Luke 24:36) he says to them, which, of course, leaves them anything but peaceful.

Knowing they couldn't believe their own eyes, he says to them,

Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have. (Luke 24:39)

After that, it's back to the basics.

This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms. Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. (vv. 44-45)

That must've been the most awesome Bible study anyone could imagine. And it was back to the basics.

Friends, it's no coincidence that this was a recurring theme in the life of Christ. An expert in human nature, he

knew how important it was, and still is. You can never go back to the basics too many times.

Know what you believe.
Know why you believe it.

You may remember my saying that reasonable religion will not change the world. I believe that. Halfhearted commitment is a contradiction in terms. I believe that as well.

Friends, God has wired and equipped you to serve him in some special way, and you may never discover it unless you develop the disciplines that lead to transformative discipleship. And remember,

Disciples are people who are becoming more like Jesus in their character and emotional and spiritual development.

Friends, nothing will change unless we get beyond the antiseptic life of religious routine. Showing up in church and then living like the rest of the world will not change the world.

A team or an army is not mobilized by good intentions or catch phrases.

I came across a comment that puts it together for me.

"The evidence for Jesus' resurrection is so strong that nobody would question it except for two things: first, it is a very unusual event; and second, if you believe it happened, you have to change the way you live."²

Will you do that?

This summer will feature a review and reaffirmation of our mission and vision. You remember, it's printed on the back of most of our bulletins with our logo on the front and even on the building itself. Then again, perhaps it was long ago relegated to those places with little more than an occasional glance. Twenty eight days go by much too quickly.

² *Prism*, 4 (March/April 1997), 34, as cited in <http://www.preachingplus.com/DisplaySermon.aspx?id=135>, accessed April 13, 2006.

So, friends, stay tuned and remain attentive. As we move ahead in seeking God's choice for our new pastor, we do well to prepare by reestablishing our firm foundation.

Learn what that's about, friends. Affirm it yourself. It'll save your life and change your world.