

FLIPPING OVER PHILIPPIANS 3

“JOY ON THE JOURNEY”

“I don’t mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection! But I keep working toward that day when I will be all that Christ Jesus saved me for and wants me to be. No dear brothers and sisters, I am still not all I should be, but I am focusing all my energies on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God, through Christ Jesus is calling us up to heaven.” Phil. 3: 12-14

This disjointed series has reached chapter three, but let’s begin by reviewing.

Flipping over Philippians 1 had to do with Joy in Jail, where we saw Paul rejoicing that even his imprisonment was cause for joy, because it afforded him the opportunity to see the gospel extended to a new network of people. Flipping over Philippians 2 had to do with Joy in Jesus, where we heard Paul admonishing the Philippian Christians to maintain Christ-like attitudes of humility, servant hood, and obedience. Today brings us to the third chapter and I’ve titled it, Joy on the Journey. In this chapter, Paul gives us some welcome advice for enjoying (there’s that word again) the journey called...life!

There is a new movie in the theaters called Click, that Susan and I saw a couple weeks ago. Adam Sandler stars in this farce about a magic remote control that he uses (and abuses) to control his life, family, work and general environment. There are a number of really positive messages in the film, but one emerged to me that relates directly to this scripture, and this message. Without giving away the plot or the ending; at one point Adam Sandler is so frustrated, he fast forwards his life until he reaches what he thinks is the ultimate goal he is chasing; becoming a partner in his architectural firm. The lesson he learns I’ll leave for you who may want to see the movie, but I can make the point nonetheless.

Many people are living their lives in fast-forward, and missing the journey (with the good parts and the bad ones) all along the way! Some can't wait to be in high school, some can't wait to start college, some can't wait to graduate and enter the real world. Many in that real world can't wait till marriage, or children, or promotions come their way. There are many that can't wait for retirement, and then they'll have all the free time they desire, and the carefree life of travel and no more stress. There are some people who spend their entire lives endlessly preparing to live, and sadder still, is that they miss life all along the way!

This great passage from Paul in Philippians 3 gives us two very important instructions for enjoying the journey called life, instead of living in fast-forward longing for some day that may never arrive, and even if it does, often disappoints us because we have missed so much of life while we expected the next step or stage to be the greatest of all. Life is to be lived, and more, to be enjoyed. If your life is spinning you into a whirlwind of unfulfilled expectations, and unrealized dreams, stop, slow down, and begin enjoying the journey and adventure called life. Here's how, according to Paul.

1. HONESTLY ACKNOWLEDGE WHERE YOU ARE ON THE JOURNEY

Paul's message begins with an honest acknowledgement that he has not yet reached his ultimate (or even intermediate) destination. Listen to these phrases that appeared in our text:

-“I haven't achieved these things” (He was talking about fully knowing Christ, sharing his suffering, sharing his death.)

-“I haven't reached perfection.”

-“And I'm not all that I should be”

Are you catching the glimpse and the message? Paul, the great apostle states for the record that he has not arrived, he is not yet perfect as he shall one day be, he has not yet become all that Christ calls, and wants him to be.

I think this honest acknowledgement is vital for us getting off the rat race track that many of our lives have become. Many of us live in the subconscious delusion that we can be (or are) perfect in our work place, in our marriages, in our homes, in our schools. It's not that we need the constant reminder that we are scum of the earth, or lower than a snakes belly; we just need the honest recognition that none of us have arrived. Chasing perfection, even though we'd never admit that is what we are doing, is dangerous, and stupid!

I read an internet newspaper magazine article this week about Ashley Judd, the actress, and sister/daughter of the famous Nashville Judd family. She has recently been released from a treatment facility where she was receiving help for depression. Judd says her childhood was a time of "complete and total chaos." She attended 13 schools in 12 years and lived alternately with her mother, grandmother and father. As a result, Judd says, she became "a hyper vigilant child," striving to be perfect. (quote) "A wonderful pastor once told me, 'Perfectionism is the highest order of self-abuse,'" she tells the magazine. "So now I try to remind myself that if I engage in perfectionism, I am abusing myself. Period."

I know we United Methodists are "going on to perfection" in John Wesley's immortal words, but that was never, nor is it today the goal for this life of ours! The going on to perfection Wesley taught was a process of continual growth and progression toward Christlikeness, it was not a state to be attained, then boasted about, but a goal always before us; imploring us onward...and upward.

Wherever you find yourself today, especially if you are living in bondage to the perfection trap, stop; honestly acknowledge that you haven't yet arrived, and you want to begin enjoying the journey more as you now consider the second instruction:

2. DILIGENTLY STRIVE TO REACH THE DESTINATION

Rejecting perfectionism is no backhanded call for laziness, far from it. Paul reminds us all that:

-“I keep working to be all that Christ saved me for and wants me to be”

-“I focus all my energies on this one thing”:

--“forgetting the past” and

--“looking forward to what lies ahead”

-“I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize:

God’s calling - heaven”

Let’s think about what Paul is and is not saying here. First, he nowhere says we are uninvolved in the spiritual progression of our lives. Spiritual growth is God’s business, but it’s our responsibility! We don’t make ourselves grow any more than an infant does, what we do, is make sure we are taking in proper nourishment, and eliminating improper wastes, and we’ll grow.

Paul goes further and gives us a specific focus and perspective for the enjoyable living of our lives. Did you see it? It’s intriguing. “This one thing is the main focus of my life: Forgetting the past, and looking forward to what lies ahead.” We might think it’s two things, but Paul says it’s one thing: forgetting the past, and pressing on to what lies ahead. Interestingly enough we have neither the ability to rewind our past, or fast forward to our future, yet both of those things tempt us, and harm us.

Many of us have pasts we are all too happy to forget, but some of us have pasts that have become a source of pride, and the defining description of who we think we are, or at least the image we present. Dangerous. I’m glad that we don’t have to be bound by our past, whether good or bad. Early in the chapter Paul rehearses just how great a Jew he is, the exceptional training he received, the passionate living of his former life. Do you think that might have been part of his past he is forgetting? I think it is exactly so.

There is a delicate balance to be struck between honoring our past, and not worshipping it, or living in bondage to it. There is a delicate balance to be struck in enjoying the present realities of our life, (even the painful ones) and living in the hopefulness of a future yet to be realized.

I am not advocating we live in some ambiguous state of ill-defined nirvana, but that we live authentic human lives, honestly acknowledging exactly where we find ourselves on the spiritual spectrum, and diligently striving to become exactly what God created, called and wants to help us become.

Joy for the journey is found ultimately, supremely in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. He is the only one able to erase an unpleasant past, or instill an authentic hope for the future in the midst of a dark present.

What is the focus of your life? Your past...? Your future...? Remember, it's not only about where we come from, or where we are going, it's also about living in the present. Let's not allow the past to inflict it's positive or negative effects on our present. And let's not allow the future, with all it's positive or negative effects to steal us away from enjoying the journey right now! Let us pray.

FLIPPING OVER PHILIPPIANS 3

“JOY ON THE JOURNEY”

“I don’t mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection! But I keep working toward that day when I will be all that Christ Jesus saved me for and wants me to be. No dear brothers and sisters, I am still not all I should be, but I am focusing all my energies on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God, through Christ Jesus is calling us up to heaven.” Phil. 3: 12-14

1. HONESTLY _____ WHERE YOU ARE ON THE _____

-“I haven’t achieved these things”

-“I haven’t reached perfection.”

-“And I’m not all that I should be”

2. DILIGENTLY _____ TO REACH THE _____

-“I keep working to be all that Christ saved me for and wants me to be”

-“I focus all my energies on this one thing”:

--“forgetting the past” and

--“looking forward to what lies ahead”

-“I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize:

God’s calling - heaven”