

Sunday, July 26, 2015

Why Am I Here?

Luke 4:31-44

Marysville UMC

Pastor Jenny Smith

Why are you here?

When people are asked this question, many respond, "I want my life to matter, to make a difference. I want to enjoy life. To love and feel loved. I want to succeed." Or they'll think of a specific answer like, "to be a teacher, to raise my kids, to solve a big problem in our world, to care for creation."

Why am I here? This is a hard question that I can't really answer for you this morning. But I can point in a direction for us to explore. Several of Jesus' teachings rise to the surface when we think about the meaning of life. Jesus clearly wants his followers to love God, love others and love ourselves. He wants to give us an abundant life - life to the fullest - to be whole and healed people.

But I can't answer for you what that looks like in everyday life. That's what we each get to figure out for ourselves. Now, in this room alone, we're all at different places in life. Some are just starting out and wondering what their life's work will be. Some have retired and are looking at a new phase of life and wondering what their purpose will be. Still others are looking around at their life and worried they picked the wrong thing.

Why are you here?

We get to ask that question every morning when we wake up. And when we crawl into bed and lay our head down on the pillow at night, we answer it with the way we lived that day. This is a question we get to answer for ourselves, no one should answer it for us. **What terrifying freedom!**

A couple months ago, I listened to a podcast about figuring out our priorities in life and how to stay focused on them when distractions swirl around us. I'd like to share some of those thoughts with you today.

Our life is a sacred gift. We've been given energy and life to do something in the world. Far too many people are moving far too quickly, distracted, overcommitted, busy busy busy. Why is everything so busy? It's normal to say, "yeah, it's been crazy."

Why is crazy the new norm? This can't be how it's supposed to be.

What does a focused, disciplined, calm & centered life look like? Where we've given ourselves to a few things, because that's all we really have time and energy for. To be fully present and engaged in those few things. Most of all, to enjoy them. **If we've said yes to those things, now we have a filter to say no to everything else that is actually a distraction.**

In the book of Luke - Jesus was teaching & healing & giving a vision of the Kingdom of God - he was bringing new life. Jesus leaves the large crowd and went to deserted place to pray. But the crowds followed him. They wanted to prevent Jesus from leaving them. "You can't leave us." Jesus says, "I must proclaim to other cities too." **He leaves. Real people with real needs and Jesus looks them in the eyes and says, "no."**

If you want to figure out why you're here, what your purpose is...this may be helpful. **You can't say no until you've said yes.**

(invitation to pull out calendar)

Friends, think about your calendar for a minute. Whether it's on paper, scribbled on napkin or synced to your phone, your calendar tells you what's important to you. Think about what fills those little boxes. Someone once encouraged me to pray over my calendar as a spiritual practice. To open it up, look at all the things I've scheduled and reflect about what I truly want to fill my life with. Yes, some things we just have to do. But we often fill up our calendar with what you could call B- activities.

One question to ask yourself when a new opportunity arises: Does this opportunity fit with the few things we're doing or is it a distraction?

The good is often the enemy of the best.

- The podcast author was invited to fundraising dinner that he wasn't really passionate about
- Friend is passionate about it, that's great. I'm not. I have my own causes.
- This is a good thing. But it's not one of the few things we are doing. It's a B-. It's someone else's A.
- **We end up involved in a whole lot of good things but they take all our energy from the few best things.**
- Oprah gets asked to give money to a kids cause. They say, "We know you love the children." "Yes, I love the children, but not all of them."
- You can't care about everything.
- You end up all over the place.
- I've found it freeing at times in my life to be reminded Jesus walked away from hurting people.
- **When we try to care about everything, we have no time left to focus on the few great things we want to be about.**
- **And I think we almost always make more of an impact on those few great things than running around helping with 15 things.**

Limits are your friend

- We need limits on time, energy, heart
- My heart can only care about so many things, beyond that, I'm just going through the motions
- It's okay to not care about everything.
- **It's better to be fully present and rested and engaged for one thing then rushed and scattered and distracted for ten.**
- Do one thing well. Be there. Be totally there and no where else.

Is there anything you're doing out of guilt?

- You're doing it because you think you're supposed to. "Tell me about the supposed to committee." Why do we do that? Is it our ego?
- Our ego hates the thought that we have limits. Our ego wants to do it all.
- As you listen less and less to your ego, and more and more to God, you become okay with limits.
- "I would love to do that but I can't. And it's okay."
- Is there anything you're doing because you fear if you stop doing it, you won't look good/accomplished/spiritual enough?
- We don't want people to think we can't do it all
- But it's okay to say: "I would love to, but it's too much."

You can't say no until you've said yes.

Once we get some clarity about our dreams, priorities and purpose, it gets a lot easier to say no to the distractions.

My friend, Summer, shared a book review on Facebook a month ago. I think Summer is great and if she loved the book, I knew I would too. So I bought, "The Life Changing Magic of Tidying Up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing." Summer said it helped her get rid of a lot of clutter and unnecessary things in their home. And since we were in packing and cleaning mode, I could use all the help I could get.

I confess to rolling my eyes a bit in the first couple chapters. I couldn't believe I was reading an entire book on cleaning. But this best-selling book helped me deal with the underlying reasons why we hold onto possessions. Instead of getting rid of something because I haven't used it in a year, her primary question is, "Does this bring me joy?" By focusing on my "yes" first, I was able to say no to a lot of things that didn't bring me joy - in fact they cluttered up my life and my mind and made it difficult to focus on what I wanted my life to be about.

You can't say no until you've said yes.

As long as we live a distracted and cluttered life, it's difficult to live into our purpose - why we're here. **When we have the confidence to say "no" because we're focused on our "yes," then God gets some great room to work in and through us.**

And here's the grace for today, my friends. Does life feel cluttered and chaotic and you're worried it might be like that for a while? The good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that God is still present, working in and through you, even in the middle of the mess, even when you have absolutely no idea why you're here.

We don't need to get our life together, our homes cleaned up, our plans in order to be a part of the kingdom of God. Every time we say yes to God in some way, big or small, we continue this journey towards wholeness in Christ. And God continues to teach us how to let go and open up our lives for whatever is next.

Every day, the world will drag you by the hand, yelling, "This is important! And this is important! You need to worry about this! And this! And this!" And each day, it's up to you to yank your hand back, put it on your heart and say, "No. This is what's important." (Momastery)

So why are you here, church? To love God, love others and love yourself. And **you** get to figure out what that looks like! May we be about this work in the coming days. Amen!

*Podcast notes from Rob Bell, RobCast