

## Wesley United Methodist Church

March 4, 2018

“Making Your Days Count.”

Psalm 90:1-12, Mark 9:30-37

In Psalm 90:12, we are counseled to “number our days.” If you were to do that, number your days, you would come up with 27,375 days. That’s assuming you reach 75 years of age—which census statistics tell us is about the average life span now for both men and women—then you will live for 27,375 days. At the age of 85 years of age, you will live for 31,025 days. That sounds like a lot, but how quickly they pass.

Our basic interest this day is not counting our days, but making our days count. And the way we make our days count is to determine our purpose in life and to give ourselves to that purpose. That makes sense, doesn’t it? Know your purpose and you can make your life count. Somebody turned that into a best-selling book, *The Purpose Driven Life*.

Human beings want to have meaning. They do not want to wake up in the morning with the realization that they are fidgeting until they die.

Our central purpose is the thing that keeps us from fidgeting our lives away. Whatever that central purpose is—whether we consciously choose it or just drift along with our desires—it’s the benchmark we look to when we measure the success or failure of our days.

Jesus only lived about 12,045 days on this earth, yet historians and theologians agree that he was the most influential person who ever lived. From age twelve, he knew his life’s purpose: to do the will of God. Even when God’s will for him was painful, even when Jesus’ friends didn’t support him, he still lived only to fulfill God’s purposes for his life.

In our N. T. scripture reading for today, we read that Jesus and his disciples “left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus didn’t want anyone to know where they were, because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, ‘The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.’ But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.”

The reason Jesus understood his purpose so clearly is because he was thinking with the mind of God. In the past weeks we heard that Jesus was spending time in prayer. Through prayer, he filled his mind with the thoughts of God, he filled his heart with the will of God, he filled his mouth with the words of God, and he pointed his feet on the pathways God had laid out for him. But it’s painfully obvious in this scripture that Jesus’ friends did not understand him. What’s worse, they didn’t want to understand. They were afraid to know the truth.

Have you ever been afraid to surrender your life to God? I suspect that many of us don’t pray because we’re afraid what will happen if we let God into our lives. We don’t ask God to reveal his will to us because we just don’t want to know.

We want a comfortable life, not an abundant one. And if we were to view our lives through God’s eyes, we just might have to change our life purpose from self-gratification to God-glorification.

That’s the challenge Jesus faced in our Bible passage today. He has used up about 12,037 of his 12,045 days. If he is ever going to teach his disciples about the purpose of their lives, now is the time. How would they be living if their plans and purposes were perfectly aligned with God’s will? The answer was surprising then, and it’s still a challenge today.

Verse 33 reads, “When he was in the house, he asked them, ‘What were you arguing about on the road?’ But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.” Let’s stop here and imagine what Jesus was thinking. He knew what his disciples were arguing about. And he knew how shallow and pointless their ambitions appeared when compared to the life-changing mission God had in store for them. And because they weren’t thinking with the mind of God, they weren’t seeking the purposes of God.

Washington Irving once wrote, “Great minds have purposes, little minds have wishes.” All these men had was a wish—a wish for greater status, a wish to stand in Jesus’ spotlight to soak up some applause. Jesus wanted them to look beyond their own selfish wishes to embrace the purposes of God. So he sat down.

This wasn’t because he was tired. Rabbis traditionally sat down to teach.

This was no casual conversation he was entering into. He was making it clear that now was the time for him to teach and for them to listen.

“Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, ‘If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.’”

Here is the central purpose of the Christian life: to serve. It doesn’t matter if you are a janitor of a large company or its CEO, your central purpose as a follower of Christ is to serve. Successful people understand that.

One man who had an enormous impact on his company was the founder and former CEO of Wendy's fast food restaurants, Dave Thomas. Dave Thomas was a remarkable success story. Adopted as a child, he never finished high school.

In his book, *Well Done: The Common Guy's Guide to Everyday Success*, Dave said he got his MBA long before his G.E.D. He says he has a photograph of himself in his MBA graduation outfit—a snazzy knee-length work apron. He claims to be the only founder among America's big companies whose picture in the corporate annual report shows him wielding a mop and plastic bucket. That wasn't a gag.

He calls it leading by example. At Wendy's, he says, MBA doesn't mean Master of Business Administration. It means Mop Bucket Attitude. It means a commitment to service. Dave Thomas who died in 2002 had a commitment to service.

That's what Jesus wants from his disciples—a Mop Bucket Attitude.

We exist to serve, not to be served. That's the secret of happiness in any job—to see it as a calling, a vocation, an opportunity. This is why some people are so unhappy in life. They want to be served rather than to serve. And the ironic thing is that people who are waited on hand and foot are the unhappiest people of all.

And then Jesus took a little child and had him stand among them.

Taking him in his arms, Jesus said to them, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me." A little child. A am so glad that there are people in this church who regard serving children as part of their life purpose.

I was reading about Olympic track star, Kip Keino. Keino could have become a national celebrity after his numerous wins in the Olympics. Instead, he used his status and money to create an orphanage in his native Kenya. He and his wife care for more than 250 children. As he says, "I came into this world with nothing.

I will leave with nothing. While I am here, I should be mindful of those people who need help."

A little child. A group of European theologians once visited Mother Teresa in Calcutta. She said to them, "Try to do what I am doing, then you will be able to enjoy what I am doing." She took them to one of her childcare centers and picked up a child who was playing in the mud and gave the child a hug and a kiss.

She waited for her guests to do the same. None of them did.

A little child. We're told that Jesus selected a child as a way of saying to the disciples that they were to serve those who were helpless, those who could not help themselves, regardless of their age. This is how we best serve God—by serving the least and the lowest.

This is it. Here is how to make your life count. Find a place where you can serve. It may be in your work. It may be here at church. You will never be happy or truly successful until you see that we are here to serve, not to be served. To serve others, particularly the least and the lowest, is the best way to serve God.

And in the end it's not the years in a life it's the life in the years.