

Wesley United Methodist Church

February 4, 2018

“Remember To Pray...”

Mark 1:29-39

Architect Frank Lloyd Wright was fond of an incident that may have seemed insignificant at the time, but had a profound influence on the rest of his life. The winter he was nine, he went walking across a snow-covered field with his reserved, no-nonsense uncle. As the two of them reached the far end of the field, his uncle stopped him. He pointed out his own tracks in the snow, straight and true as an arrow's flight, and the young Frank's tracks meandering all over the field. “Notice how your tracks wander aimlessly from the fence to the cattle to the woods and back again,” his uncle said. “And see how my tracks aim directly to my goal.

There is an important lesson in that.”

Years later, the world-famous architect liked to tell how the experience had contributed to his philosophy in life. “I determined right then,” he'd say with a twinkle in his eye, “not to miss the things in life, that my uncle missed.”

Frank Lloyd Wright saw in those tracks what his uncle could not: It is easy to let the demands of life keep us from the joys of living.

We all recognize that any goal in life worth achieving demands a great deal of our energy. If you are a doctor you must spend many hours alone and in residency studying the human body. The life of your patient demands it. If you are a teacher you must live in the library researching and preparing for your lecture. The mind of your student demands it. If you are a carpenter you must patiently measure the building before you drive the first nail. The integrity of the structure depends on it. If you are a mother, you must sacrifice your life for another. Your children require it.

We could not live if we didn't set goals and work to fulfill them. No sane person would argue otherwise. But here's what young Wright discovered at the tender age of nine, and what some don't learn until 59. The objective in life is not the goal but the journey on the way to the goal.

The whole city had gathered around the door, pressing to see Jesus.

The demands on him were already piling up. He cured many, cast out demons, and taught constantly. And his disciples didn't help matters. When he left early in the morning to pray, they went searching for him. And when they found him, they said, “What are you doing, everyone is searching for you?”

How do we enjoy the journey when everyone and everything is searching for you, wanting a piece of you, demanding your time?

Well, remember that hard work is required. We all have to work.

We work at our jobs; we work at home; we do homework; we even work on our marriages. And why do we do all this work? I think most of us know what we find in Proverbs 6:10 and 24:33, “A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest—and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man.” We are fools, the Wisdom book tells us, if we say to ourselves, a little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little more. We work because well living demands it. Have you ever heard this one, “Good, better, best. Never let it rest. Until your good is better and your better is best?” I am sure some of your grandparents mentioned that. I am sure that every family has treasures like these to pass down to their children. “Idle hands are the devil's workshop.” Work.

Hard work is good for the soul. To have a goal, to apply yourself and accomplish that goal, there is no feeling like it.

That's what I see when I look at Jesus in this passage. Look what kind of day he has: First, Jesus is just getting started on the job. It's the beginning of his ministry. Mark tells us that after one of his first sermons he is thrown into the thick of it. They leave the synagogue and immediately he is confronted with the sickness of Peter's mother-in-law. She has a fever and he heals her. He takes her by the hand and help her up. The fever leaves her and what does she do? She goes to work. She waits on Peter, James, John, Simon, Andrew, and Jesus. The other disciples are probably there as well. You would think Jesus would have said, you lay still until you get your strength back.

After the sun sets all the people in this small town bring their sick and demon possessed. The whole town is gathered at the door and they are healed.

Nothing more is said about Peter's mother-in-law but I'm sure she could not have imagined after starting her day with a deadly fever, that she would end up entertaining 12 disciples and their rabbi, then ending the day with the town descending on her home. At some point that evening they all finally get some sleep.

But instead of sleeping-in, Jesus gets up before dawn and leaves the house to pray. Then Simon and company go looking for him. When they find him in solitude and prayer, “Everyone is searching for you,” Simon says. Jesus could have said a number of things at this point, but what he says is surprising. Instead of trying to get across the obvious, that

he is trying to have a moment alone, all to himself with God, he says, "You're right, Simon, you're right, let's go to the next town so we get started there."

Let us go somewhere else so I can preach. Let us leave this solitude and go to work. It is then that Jesus said, "That is why I have come." He understood what he had to do and he set about doing it. Perhaps he didn't get the time he needed to solitude. Neither do we. When everyone is searching for you it is a reminder that hard work is required.

Another thing is when everyone is searching for you, you should remember not to let others define your goal. How do we work hard and keep it from killing us?

I think the obvious answer is to take some time off and some time away from the work. I hope you do take vacations. There are other ways of combating fatigue. Listen to this short exchange between Peter and Jesus. "Jesus, everyone is searching for you!" It sounds like he is pretty excited about something and is chastising Jesus for slipping away.

I believe that when the sun came up, people descended upon Peter's mother-in-law's house and the disciples had no idea what to do with them. Listen to Jesus response: Let's go somewhere else. I can hear Simon saying: What about...there are sick people...what do I tell my mother-in-law? Somewhere else, Peter.

Here is the surprise: Jesus didn't feel that he had to respond to every need. When Jesus was in Capernaum, he was not in Bethsaida. People in Bethsaida could not be healed. When he was in the wilderness, people back in town were suffering. Jesus didn't meet the needs of all people in Palestine during his three years. Wonder why? It wasn't his goal. Simon thought it was.

At least in this moment, Simon thought it was his goal.

So what was Jesus' goal? Jesus says to preach. That's why I have come, to preach. There may be some healings along the way, Simon, but let's not get lost in hysteria. I have come to preach the kingdom of God and we must go elsewhere.

Finally, when everyone is searching for you remember to pray.

Our Lord needed to and so do you. There may not be a lot of time to get adequate prayers in when the crowds are descending upon the house, when 12 disciples coming at you, when there are demons to deal with, and sick family members, but find a moment, even if you have to hide. They'll find you eventually, you know they will, but by then you will have found some food for the journey.

And you know what that food will help you do? It will help you work hard.

There is a lot of work out there that needs to get done, at our jobs, at home, in our marriages, and right here, in the church, hard work for the kingdom of God.

It will help you do one other thing. It'll help you stay focused on your goal.

It might not be your job to preach. Your job likely is elsewhere. But you won't get sidetracked and try to take on every job and every role in the kingdom.

You'll go where you need to go and do what you can do. And that's enough. Amen.