

“Getting Out”

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October 18, 2015

New Testament Lesson: John 5:9-17

Old Testament Lesson: Genesis 1:31-2:3

I spent last week at a church conference of the PC(USA) exploring the borders of our lives – where does leisure time end and work begin, what gets in the way of what we really feel called to do or grow into, how do we strike a balance.

The amazing part about it is how much the different parts of our lives overlap and interconnect. It's impossible to change one aspect of your life – say your job or hobby or living arrangement – without it affecting all other aspects of life.

Anyone with an aging or ill family member knows that you are greatly affected by it – everything you do and how you think about life changes in an instant. How do we maintain a sense of stability in life, a place to return to that can't be shaken? The answer is Core Values.

The Rev. Brian Taylor of Albuquerque, NM, developed a process for identifying your Core Values. It starts with discerning your passion and principles. Let's do that now.

Think about your basic, core values; what are they? Just one or two. What gives your life meaning? Think about it. What shapes your relationship to the world around you? Does everybody have at least one Core Value in mind?

Maybe it's caring for your family, or giving back to the community, or living into your Christian values of worship and spiritual growth, fellowship and service. Whatever your Core Values are, notice how life pushes in on them. Your job takes time away from family, family obligations make it hard to take care of yourself, the desire to be active at church or after school or in the community takes a backseat to other aspects of life, and we just don't know where or how to draw the line.

It's all about Core Values, those things God calls you to do or be in your heart of hearts. In today's New Testament lesson, Jesus teaches us something about Core Values – that they are worth preserving no matter what.

Jesus sees a man paralyzed his entire adult life, just sitting there by a pool of healing water, because he has no one to put him into the pool. And he says to the man, “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” At once, the man is made well, takes up his mat, and begins to walk. The problem is, it was the Sabbath and the Sabbath was a Core Value in Jesus' day. They had all kinds of laws about it – what you could and couldn't do on the Sabbath. Carrying your mat was considered work and it was against the law to work on the Sabbath.

So the authorities question the man about it, saying, “Who ... said to you, ‘Take ... up (your mat) and walk’?” They had clear boundaries to enforce, based on keeping the Sabbath holy – set apart from other aspects of life, even the desire to heal someone no matter what.

Isn't that what we're talking about here with our Core Values – where we draw the line? It would be so much easier if we had a law to tell us where to draw the line when work, school, family obligations, self-care, and community commitments start to overlap.

But we don't. We can't even rely on our start and end times at work or school or volunteering, because they just box us in – kind of like the Sabbath law that pushed up against Jesus and his Core Values some 2,000 years ago.

Jesus' values are the same today as they were in the beginning; Core Values never change and this makes them an incredibly powerful tool for you in knowing where to draw the line in life.

Jesus valued the Sabbath as much as the next guy. It's just that his Core Values were more important. Jesus focused on the spirit of the law over and above the letter of the law. The letter of the law was clear – no work on the Sabbath, and carrying your mat was considered work; Jesus was not arguing about that.

What Jesus was arguing about – where he did draw the line – was at the underlying principle that gave rise to the Sabbath in the first place. The Sabbath was created for the benefit of humankind, not the other way around.

We see this where Jesus says, “My Father is still working, and I also am working.” Jesus had a different value system concerning the Sabbath. William Barclay, the world renowned Bible commentator, puts it this way: “True,” he says, “according to the creation story, God rested on the seventh day; but he rested from creation; his higher works of judgment and mercy and compassion and love still went on.” “Jesus said: ‘Even on the Sabbath God's love and mercy and compassion act; and so do mine.’”¹ In other words, his Core Values were active no matter where he was or what he was doing.

The church deacon was at his post one Sunday, greeting those who arrived for worship, when a young man named Bill came in. Bill was a college student with wild hair, torn clothing and rather imperfect hygiene. The service had already begun, and so Bill starts down the aisle looking for a seat. The church is completely packed, and he can't find one. By now people are looking a bit uncomfortable, but no one says anything. Bill gets closer and closer and closer to the pulpit and, when he realizes there are no seats, he sits down on the carpet. By now the people are really uptight. And in comes the deacon, with his silver-gray hair and expensive suit. He's a godly man – very elegant, very dignified – who walks with a cane. So it takes a long time for the man to reach the boy. The church is utterly silent except for the clicking of the man's cane.

¹ William Barclay, *The New Daily Study Bible, The Gospel of John*, St Andrews Press, Edinburgh, 2001, Page 213.

All eyes are focused on him so the minister can't even preach the sermon until the deacon does what he has to do. And now they see this elderly man drop his cane on the floor, and with great difficulty, he lowers himself and sits down next to Bill on the carpet. He stays there the whole service, so the visitor doesn't have to worship alone.²

Now that's living into your Core Values, no matter what. Can you imagine doing that – putting your reputation and job and position in society on the line for your Core Values?!? It's not easy. But it is freeing. Living life based on your Core Values frees you from the worry that you're not doing your job, what you're supposed to; frees you from the feeling that you're not good enough or rich enough or successful enough.

None of these things matter if you know and live into your Core Values, that one or maybe two things that you identified as central to who God created you to be – live into your core values and all the actions and attitudes that spring forth from there. In other words, don't let your life circumstances change who you are in your heart of hearts, but rather find ways to express that in your everyday life.

This is the final sermon in our series on work, and I said we'd look at what to do when you realize you're stuck in the wrong job or role in life. The answer is live into your Core Values.

If you can maintain your true passion and principles in whatever role you have, you can be assured that God is using you in a special and meaningful way. And if you can't – if your passion lies elsewhere or your principles are suffering – find another outlet besides your work or primary role in life. Find someplace else where you can live into your passion and uphold your principles.

Getting out doesn't have to mean leaving where you are. If you're feeling called to get out, then get out of the box; being thinking about your life in a new way. Orient yourself around your Core Values, step by step, and then watch for where God is leading you.

No matter who you are or what role you have in life, you can't go wrong being the best you you can be. It's only when we lose touch with who we truly are that we flounder in life.

So, I encourage all of us this week to take some time to think about our Core Values, your God-given passion and guiding principles – and look for how they are or could be applied where you are today. Are there ways to go deeper? And if you were to go deeper, how might God use you and bless you, to the glory of God and the betterment of this world. Amen.

² <http://www.homileticsonline.com/>

Pastoral Prayer

Holy God, we want our lives to matter. We want our time on this earth to count for something – something meaningful, something important, something eternal.

We do not want to lead shallow lives, squandering our time and energies on that which ultimately counts for nothing.

And so, we come in humility, asking you to remake us. Reorder our lives that we may truly delight in your word. Grant us wisdom to seek you above all else.

Awaken us to the divine purpose you have for our lives, how we can be more truly the person you created us to be.

But most of all, God, pour out upon us at this moment the power of your love, compassion, and abundance, that we might return it ten-fold to you in service to others.

We pray for ... the health and wellness of all people, and especially those we know who are struggling with illness and disease. Bless them with your healing touch.

We pray for those who grieve, draw close to them as a comforting parent or friend.

We pray for those in need, help us to give where we can and to look to you when the world's needs exceed our ability to overcome them.

For you alone know all our needs and how best to approach them. For it was you who summed up our needs and how best to pray for them.

And so it is that we pray the prayer that you taught us, through your son Jesus Christ, saying together:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts as we
forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil,
For Thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory forever.**

Amen.