

December 04, 2022.

## REDIRECTING OUR LIVES

Matthew 3:1-12

Technology has improved our lives significantly. (And it has caused a lot of headaches as well.) One of the technological marvels for which I thank God is the GPS (Global Positioning System). I cannot imagine how I would have gotten around without it. Before I became familiar with GPS, every trip to an unfamiliar destination was marked by great anxiety – would I be able to find my way there, would I get lost, would I be able to find my way back home, what if I had to take a detour? Those were questions that troubled my mind.

I am poor at following directions; hence I was always anxious and at times even afraid when I had to drive to unfamiliar places. Now I set out not knowing how to get where I am going but nonetheless heading out in confidence because I trust my GPS to keep me on track. Yes, there have been times, in fact, numerous occasions, when for one reason or the other, I took a wrong turn in spite of having the GPS, but always, I would be redirected to a path that would get me to my destination.

I would be redirected not because the road I am on is a difficult or dangerous road on which to travel; I would be redirected because the road that I am on will not lead me to my destination; it would not lead to the realization of the purpose of my journey.

As we journey through life – through its various phases and stages, as we move through our jobs and careers and retirement; through the many interests that we pursue and the different causes that we champion, as we move through the various relationships that we share, it becomes necessary at times for us to redirect our lives.

Not necessarily because the path we are on is dangerous or difficult, but more fundamentally, because that path will not take us where we need to be going.

When we find ourselves on a path that is not taking us where we would like to be or more importantly, where we need to be going in life, however easy or comfortable the present journey may be, it is only a matter of time before we begin to lose our sense of meaning and purpose, to lose our passion and enthusiasm, and to find ourselves just seeming to drift through life, waiting to see what will come our way, while deep inside we long for more.

I believe that each one of us possesses a sense that our life was meant for a purpose that extends beyond our own self-interest – a sense that we are part of something that is larger than ourselves, and we want to realize that.

That's why I think many people would join various groups and organizations, because of that sense that they have deep inside that their lives are meant for a purpose that extends beyond themselves.

That's why we give to our churches and to other worthwhile and charitable causes, and contribute to the needs of people not known to us, especially at this time of year, because of that sense that we are meant to be part of something that is larger than ourselves – it is a “higher calling” as it were.

But even as we set out in pursuit of that “higher calling”, we can often find ourselves going off course for one reason or the other. It could be that the “higher calling” gets overshadowed by the enticements that we encounter or becomes muted by the cares and concerns that can so easily overtake us. It could be that we decide to choose the path that is attractive and easy rather than that which may be challenging but right.

Whatever the reason, if we continue to travel off course, we soon find ourselves living with less and less passion and purpose; and with more and more emptiness and loss of meaning. That is why it is so important when we go off course, to redirect our lives.

The Bible has a lot to say about that, it is called repentance. In our reading from Matthew 3, John called on those who went out to the wilderness of Jordan where he was baptizing, to “Repent for the kingdom of God is near”.

To repent means to change course, to go in a different direction. As theologian Marcus Borg puts it, “To repent is to embark on a journey of return to God, and to see things in a new way - a way shaped by God”.

John called on the people to repent, and the reason he gave for that call to repentance was that the kingdom of God was near.

The Kingdom of God means the reign of God. It speaks of that state of awareness and experience of God’s love and justice, God’s peace and protection, God’s presence, and provision.

And John says that such a way of living and experiencing life is possible. It is not a fantasy; it is not some utopian dream; it is within reach. But for that to be realized, we would have to redirect our lives. We would have to change course and embark on a journey of return to God. We would have to begin to see things in a new way - a way shaped by God.

The question is not whether the path our life is on now is good and comfortable or not; it is whether that path will take us to the place where we find that deeper meaning we long for, it is whether that path will help us to realize that higher calling that is there within each of us.

The kingdom of God is near. We see flashes and glimpses of it all around us. We see it in the many acts of kindness, generosity, love, selflessness and courage that are shown on a daily basis.

Look around, and see that the Kingdom of God is near— see instances of God’s love and justice, of God’s peace and protection, of God’s presence and provision being experienced and lived out - and that way of living beckons us.

Think of what it would be like if more of us were to redirect our lives in pursuit of the way of life that the Kingdom of God calls us unto, not just for a season, but as a lifestyle.

What path are you on? Think for a moment about where you are in your life and in your relationships; do you still approach your life and relationships with a sense of passion and purpose, of meaning and enthusiasm? Do you still sense that higher calling?

Are there areas of your life where there is a need for repentance? Not just being sorry for what was done or not done, but the need to redirect your life - to move in a different direction? The need to return to God and to see things in a new way shaped by God.

Is there an unhealthy relationship that needs to be repaired or addressed? Are there ways in which you can use some of your time differently and toward better ends? Is there something that you can do that would help others live more fully?

Can you give more time in service to your church and/or other charitable cause? Can you make an additional donation to your Church or some charitable cause? Can they get to know someone better and in that way, try to build a more caring relationship and community?

Can you identify a need or concern and begin praying for it daily, open to how God might direct your time and actions to contribute to change?

Can you intentionally do more to nurture your relationship with God?

In what ways do you need to redirect your lives so that the Kingdom of God which is near, and glimpses of which you see, will be experienced and lived out more fully by you and others? How do you need to redirect your lives so that you can realize that higher calling that is in you?

In Jesus, God takes on our lives and gives us hope by being with us; inviting us into relationship and unto a more abundant life; helping us to see in each other, not a competitor for scarce resources but a brother or sister in Christ. We are called to love God and to love each other.

In this season of Advent, as we think of the coming of Christ, may that higher calling in each of us be rekindled, and may we take the steps to repent and redirect our lives towards God's dream of peace and salvation for us and our communities.

Thanks be to God.

Rev. Sydney Elias