

“Finding Our Purpose
Is What Life Is All About”

A Sermon Shared with the Congregation of St. Andrew’s United Church
for Sunday, November 6, 2016

Remembrance Sunday - Communion

Scripture Readings: Psalm 98

II Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17

(by The Rev. Dr. Bill Steadman)

There are two main ways that people measure up what life is all about.

For some, the world is a bad place, and no matter what happens, how much joy is shared or success experienced, life is not what it can be.

And for others the very opposite is their story of existence – no matter how much disappointment or upset, life is valuable and worthy of the effort.

In the context of the Christian story, the above could be said in another way: all around us we see chaos and war, tension and upset, and the very daily experience that we have proves to all that the end of the world is near; someone else may say that when we see the news, and read the newspaper, we are filled with stories of war and anger, criminal activity and despair, and we are reminded that the good news of Jesus Christ came for a world such as this.

So what is it? The end of the world is nigh, or the good news is emerging before us?

There may be no easy answer, but I have a hunch that the questions we face, and the uncertainties that we experience, may be a little different from the people of Jesus’ day in the first century. We have a choice to give into despair and emptiness, or to clutch hope and faith in the good news that Jesus shared.

The choice has been there from the beginning of the faith journey. Psalm 98 speaks of celebrating with musical instruments and singing, for it is in making music that one’s life can be uplifted and made whole.

In his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul speaks about a widespread attitude that the world is falling apart, and the end is near. But Paul calls the people back to their common purpose, and initial belief that life is made whole when they are clear about why they are on this earth – looking for signs of new beginnings and not being buried by expectations of chaos and emptiness.

Susan Biali has written about the challenge of discovering our purpose. For some it is a journey that should be obvious and clear right from the start. Yet finding one’s purpose in life may not always be that clear, or that obvious.

Trained as a medical doctor, she decided at the age of 28 that her real passion was to be a dancer. Age 28. She had never taken any dance classes before. Now most people who become professional dancers start dancing at age 4 or 5, and certainly by 8 or 9 at the very

latest. But to start dancing at age 28? Seemed impossible, but Susan did become a professional dancer, and went on to not only dance but teach others how to dance.

Yet though she rose to a high level of competence, she also realized that being a dancer was not what she wanted to do solely with her life. In fact, she learned that she wanted to be an agent of making the lives of others better. So she continued to write and teach about healthy living, using her medical training, and continued to dance and instruct others, as well as be a life coach and a magazine writer. Her passion was to help other people, to be an agent of change and improvement for others, and once she was clear on her purpose, her skills and talents were utilized for that greater purpose.

She offers six ways that she is convinced characterize the movement to discerning one's purpose:

1. Elusive – we do not always know where we are to go, but we are given paths to explore and learn from.
2. Evolving – we may gain skills and abilities that augment our goal in life, and help us to live that purpose in a variety of ways. We keep evolving, and developing, and learning – we should never give up.
3. Emerges from experience – any experience can be helpful as long as we learn from it, and it will eventually lead us to our deeper purpose. When we enter into an activity thinking it will lead to our eventual chosen profession, and we decide that is not for us, many see that as failure and loss. Susan Biali sees that as a moment of clarification, for we better understand what is important to us, and can move forward from that point.
4. Exactly perfectly timed – God's time is not always our time; we need to be prepared for opportunities that come our way and we may be surprised when expected opportunities do not happen or are blocked – there may be some of God's hand in all of that. The question to ask in each experience: 'What have I (or can I) learn from this?'
5. Eminently qualified – the issue is not how good you are in relationship to others, but are you qualified and ready for the task at hand. We live in a time where we spend all of our attention on being the best, and we should seek ways to be capable and competent. After all, how many of us when we seek a new doctor or dentist or therapist ask the individual: "Before I sign up with you, I need to know your transcripts from University, and only want a professional who got more than an 85% average in professional school."?
6. Enjoyable adventure – be present in the moment and delight to see it unfold. When we let our lives unfold rather than try to control every experience and event, new opportunities and insights will also emerge.

Our goal needs to be to focus on a greater purpose. Too often we have put the emphasis on youth and young adults needing to find their career path, and we should put the emphasis on finding their purpose in life. When that is clear, then many pathways emerge as appropriate, and numerous job or vocational options can be rewarding.

The world is filled with frustrated and even failed actors. Drama classes are bulging at the seams in college and universities, and arts school, like Sudbury Secondary, are in most school boards.

They offer wonderful experiences and excellent growth opportunities. They should be supported and encouraged for many reasons. But the reality is, they may encourage far more individuals to be “on stage” performers than will ever be the case – there simply are not the jobs out there to meet the expectations such schools develop.

Now if one examined “What is my purpose” rather than “What is my vocational goal,” then the issue is dissipated. If my purpose is to “entertain people” or “to bring pleasure to people” or to “bring stories to life to make a point about the meaning of life” then all kinds of careers may emerge.

It is not unlike the challenges Western Union faced when the company thought it was a telegraph company. As technology changed, and the telegraph was no longer the communication tool of choice, then they were on the verge of going out of business, until they realized they were in the communication business, and so changed to offer new communication vehicles for the new world.

If we want to make people happy, then working in any area of the entertainment industry – props, backstage crew, hosting, promotions, ticket sales may be career options; writing scripts, producing children’s books, interior designing, artistic endeavours all may bring joy to people, and do not involve being on stage necessarily.

When we are clear about purpose, we can be clear about where we potentially may live that purpose and fulfill our goal in life.

Paul wrote to a people so worried about the end of the world they were in danger of losing their sense of purpose right here and now in this world. The good news of Jesus Christ was made for such a time as this – to remind us that no matter how much worry and upset, life is worth living, and we can be energized and uplifted by knowing we are part of a world God blesses.