

“Only one Life”

Sermon by Dan Harrison, pastor, Church of the Covenant 5/2/2021

Matthew 16:24-26

We only have one life to live. We only have one life to give, so make it count. Right? But Jesus actually admonished his followers for trying to save their lives. He said, “whoever wants to save their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake, will save it.” What could Jesus possibly mean? I think the key is in the words “for my sake.” Jesus talks about what he means by living “for my sake” when he later would say, “For I was hungry, and you didn’t feed me. I was thirsty, and you didn’t give me a drink. I was a stranger, and you didn’t invite me into your home. I was naked, and you didn’t give me clothing. I was sick and in prison, and you didn’t visit me.” And instead of asking, “Jesus when did these things happen to you; surely I would have taken care of you.” Jesus is saying to us, “It’s happening to me every day! Just look around.”

Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for my sake, will save it—but it will take everything in your life to do it. That’s what it means to be living sacrifices. We can’t give ninety-nine percent and expect the same result as when we give one hundred percent. I remember hearing a preacher tell me the story when I was a kid of an old man with a beautiful home who offered to sell it to a young couple for only 1 dollar. I mean this was a big, beautiful home worth hundreds of thousands, but for some reason he offered it all to them for only 1 dollar. The couple was in awe of his offer and took him up on it immediately. At the signing of the contract to transfer ownership, the old man made one small request—that they allow him to keep something in his home as his own and allow him to come visit it anytime he wanted. They said, “Sure.” And when they asked what it was, he pointed to a small almost unnoticeable, rusty, old, nail sticking out of the ceiling of the living room. They thought the man was crazy, of course, and agreed to his condition.

The next day the couple woke up in their new home, almost not believing their good luck. The man turned to his wife, saying, “We own all this? I can’t believe it.” The couple was so happy. Later in the evening, there was a knock at the door. They opened the door and the previous owner was their holding a sack. “Can I come see my nail?” He asked politely. A bit surprised, the younger man said, “of course.” The older man went straight to the nail in the ceiling and hung his sack there, promptly leaving without explanation. The couple was concerned but decided not to question the older man as he left. They, in agreement with their condition of ownership, left the sack attached to his nail. Three days later the smell from the sack became unbearable. The stench began to consume their beautiful home. It smelled like a dead animal. One week after that, the young couple could no longer stay in the home because of the stench, and the lawyers sided with the old man’s right to the nail in the living room. It was his. The couple signed the house back over to him.

The story is a simple one, one that I remember even as a child. Our life is not our own, it is given to God in service to kingdom work, and it’s not about saving souls, well not in the way many think; it’s about loving others unconditionally and with all we have—not 99 %. Do not leave rusty nails for others to exploit. Be the good neighbor, as we read in the Samaritan’s story. Let us not ignore the suffering all around us, for that is Jesus.