

SERMON DELIVERED AT AUBURN UMC, AUBURN, MICHIGAN

24th Sunday after Pentecost

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Text: 2 Corinthians 6:1-2, 16b

Title: "Outside My Own Little World: Start Living Right Now!"

We have been spending the last 4 Sundays considering what it means to look beyond my own little world based on the inspiration of Christian singer, Matthew West. The first week, we asked the question, "What if There's a Greater Purpose?" The message was, "keep the main thing the main thing!" We heard from the prophet Isaiah about God's desire that faith in God be expressed not just in worship rituals but out on the sidewalks of our lives, in our homes, places of work, caring for the orphan and the widow. What is our own individual purpose in the light of who God calls us to be?

The second week we heard from the book of Acts and the story of Eutychus falling asleep while Paul preached: "I Try to Stay Awake". Sometimes we go through the motions—in our lives and in our worship. Perhaps it is not about staying awake IN church, as much as it is about staying awake AS the church. The good news is that we can wake up. We can truly live. To wake up as church is to reclaim hope and the power to make a difference, like the difference the Church of the Resurrection made by delivering poinsettias to a strip club.

The third week we considered, "I Don't Want to Miss What Matters". From Jesus' story in Matthew 25 about meeting him and caring for him in the least of these we were reminded of the ways in which caring for the vulnerable among us is the bottom-line of practicing our faith. We heard the story of a man who played monopoly with his grandmother. He learned that acquisition was how you win the game. He learned it so well that he stomped his grandmother. Took her last dollar. Then she told him, "And now it all goes back in the box. All the houses, the hotels, the properties and the money. It all goes back in the box. It was never yours to begin with." What matters, what really matters when it comes to living our lives? You were invited to bring post it notes to the front with your own thoughts about what really matters in the life of the church.

Last Sunday we considered, "Give me Open Hands and Open Doors". We heard Jesus share the most important of all the laws, the great *shema*: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and soul" and your neighbor as yourself. This isn't about love, the feeling, but active love, expressed love. Love as a verb.

This morning we close this series as we consider getting started living right now. Some might say, "Well, I'm already living right now. I can go home now." But the gist of Matthew

West's reflection is that he's been rather complacent when it comes to his spiritual life because he pretty much has all he needs:

I've never gone hungry, always felt safe
I got some money in my pocket, shoes on my feet
In my own little world Population: me
I try to stay awake during Sunday morning church
I throw a twenty in the plate, but I never give 'til it hurts
I turn off the news when I don't like what I see
Yeah, it's easy to do when it's
Population: me

Is that really what our lives are about? As long as we have what we need and want there's no need for us to go deeper? Aren't we looking for more from our lives than just making sure we are taken care of?

I doubt that any of us would be sitting here right now had it not been for the Apostle Paul whose life was about very much more than making sure he was taken care of. Because of his conversion and his ongoing experience of the risen Christ with him, Paul traveled the northern Mediterranean region sharing the good news of God's love and presence in Jesus.

One of those places to which he travelled was Corinth, Greece. A metropolitan area, Corinth was a place of commerce. It was located near an isthmus—a narrow strip of land between two bodies of water. Because the strip of land was so narrow, boats were hauled across it on rollers from one body of water to the other rather than taking the longer voyage around the southern tip of Greece, saving the sailors time and the merchants' money as they shipped goods around the Mediterranean region. Corinth, then, was a strategic place to plant a church because people from all over the Mediterranean world could come to know the name of Jesus through those following him in Corinth. Paul was strategic about the way in which he taught and preached and modelled what it means to follow Jesus.

But the people in Corinth were a contentious lot and though Paul had managed to begin a congregation there, it was an uphill struggle to keep them focused on the love of Christ and not on their own and others' ideas of what it means to be a follower. There were many disagreements in the congregation over many issues: eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols, arguing over who was the best preacher, speaking in tongues as a supreme gift over all the others, to name a few. There were divisions among them. Paul could have written them off and let them fend for themselves. Let them fight it out on their own. Instead, because of his love for them, he wrote his letters and stayed in relationship with them.

Paul wanted the Corinthians to start living right now as he wrote to them as we heard a few moments ago:

As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For God says, 'In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.' I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation... God says, 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.' --2
Corinthians 6:1-2, 16b

In his notes on this passage John Wesley wrote:

And I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people - The sum of the whole gospel covenant. [Lev. xxvi, 11](#), John Wesley

Paul proclaims the message of Leviticus 26 in which God says according the version found in The Message:

“I’ll set up my residence in your neighborhood; I won’t avoid or shun you; I’ll stroll through your streets. I’ll be your God; you’ll be my people. I am GOD, your personal God who rescued you from Egypt so that you would no longer be slaves to the Egyptians. I ripped off the harness of your slavery so that you can move about freely.

And from the Prophet Isaiah Paul reminds the Corinthians that now is the time of salvation. Now is the day of God’s favor. God wants you to start living right now, not some day off into the future but now.

In the previous chapter, Paul tells them, again according to The Message:

¹⁴⁻¹⁵ Our firm decision is to work from this focused center: One man died for everyone. That puts everyone in the same boat. He included everyone in his death so that everyone could also be included in his life, a resurrection life, a far better life than people ever lived on their own.

¹⁶⁻²⁰ Because of this decision we don’t evaluate people by what they have or how they look. We looked at the Messiah that way once and got it all wrong, as you know. We certainly don’t look at him that way anymore. Now we look inside, and what we see is that anyone united with the Messiah gets a fresh start, is created new. The old life is gone; a new life burgeons! Look at it! All this comes from the God who settled the relationship between us and him, and then called us to settle our relationships with each other. God put the world square with himself through the Messiah, giving the world a fresh start by offering forgiveness of sins. God has given us the task of telling everyone what he is doing. We’re Christ’s representatives. God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God’s work of making things right between them. We’re speaking for Christ himself now: Become friends with God; he’s already a friend with you.

One man died for everyone which means we’re all in the same boat and are called to drop our differences and join God in becoming coworkers and start living right now because now is the day of salvation. No need to wait.

That gift has come through the sacrificial gift of Jesus who rather than seeking fame or political power or prestige gave his life as an expression of the lengths to which God will go in

order to demonstrate the depth of God's love for us. Rather than use violence or other more human means of exercising power, God in Jesus sacrificed out of love.

A friend and colleague reminded me what sacrificial love is about by sharing this video clip some of you will recognize.

(Watched Frozen clip.)

"Some people are worth melting for." What a great expression of sacrificial love. Some people are worth sacrificing for. From Jesus that gift came for all human beings.

Do you want to start living right now or maybe start living more deeply right now? Embrace God's love for you this morning and always. Live knowing that sacrificial love is the way of Jesus and the cross. It's not just about me. Not just about you. Rather you and I--as Jesus followers--are co-workers with God who are called not to receive God's grace in vain but to live it right now. To love God and love neighbor sacrificially.

In just a moment Roger Plessner is coming to talk about stewardship and invite all of us to come forward to share our estimate of giving cards for 2015. Our giving is one way to live sacrificial lives as we share our financial resources for the work of God in the world. As we come forward, I'd like to invite you to pay attention to the monitors and listen to the theme song for this series once again. As you view the projected photos of the life of this congregation in the last year, I wonder if you see anything of Jesus' sacrificial love. Is there anyone worth melting for or is there anything happening in which you see someone melting on behalf of someone else?