



PASTOR'S POINT OF VIEW



Michael P. Rucker
Pastor

I came across a nifty piece of art by a woman named Mary Engelbreit. She draws a picture showing two roads. A little hobo figure with a small pack is traveling down the road marked "Your Life." Behind the hobo is the road from which he has come. It is labeled "No longer an option."

Every January Judy prepares the Annual Report for the annual congregational meeting. As soon as that report, Pittsburgh Presbytery and the General Assembly of the PCUSA ask for us to complete our year end reports. All of this gathering, writing, tallying (with a big assist from Flo Raisig and Tom Ochs) is rather tedious. The year of Lord 2018 is behind us. The reports are mostly done. The books are closed, we cannot go back to 2018. It is the road marked "No longer an option."

Now we set our sights on the road marked "Your Life." We gaze quietly at the road stretched out before us. Where will that road lead? What will be required of us? What unknown changes are in store for us? No one knows for certain.

Many times, we answer those questions after we looking inside ourselves, after sifting through our heart's desires and deciding what we want to do. But the purpose of discipleship Jesus is realizing that what we want to do becomes the road marked "No longer an option." Our lives are not really our own anymore. The questions become: what does God want from me? where does God want me to go? what is God calling me to do? Those questions in the hearts of Jesus' disciples.

Where do we begin to answer these questions? We begin on our knees, with our heads bowed, our busy mind quieted, my hearts open. We begin by leaning on the words of Jesus, "**I am the vine, you are the branches, abide in me...remain in me...and you will bear much fruit.**" Being a fruit-bearing Christian is the road marked, "Your Life." What fruit bearing lies ahead for you?

Pastor Michael

WORSHIP SCHEDULE FOR FEBRUARY

FEBRUARY 3

SCOUT SUNDAY – the young men from Troop 23 and their adult leaders will assist in worship leadership. And what did the Beatle's sing so many years ago? Fill in the blank: *All you need is _____*. That will be the guiding theme for this morning's worship service. All will be welcome to gather 'round the table as we celebrate the Lord's Supper.

FEBRUARY 10

Sometimes the presence of God is as quiet as a shadow. Sometimes as disquieting as a summer storm. Sometimes lives are changed. We will hear the testimony of two people whose lives took a dramatic turn when they encountered the presence of God: the prophet Isaiah and the Apostle Paul. Has the presence of God ever moved you in a specially meaningful way?

FEBRUARY 17 – An Emerging Worship experience

Most people have heard of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount found in the Gospel of Matthew. This morning we will read the first part of the parallel account of the sermon found in Luke's gospel. From the mountain top, Matthew's Jesus waxes eloquent. In Luke, he speaks incisively. His words cut to the quick. Those of us who have ears let us hear.

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News from the Edge is the monthly newsletter of the First Presbyterian Church of Edgewood. If you have information you would like to include in the next issue, email Judy Mysels at office@fpcedgewood.org by the 15th of the prior month. Sponsorship is available for \$40 per month.

Worship Schedule for February (cont'd.)

FEBRUARY 24

We will listen to part II of Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus' lesson on love is the most revolutionary lesson of all. What an expectation. What a call. Then he turns his focus to the sobering consequences of a judgmental spirit. Whoever said that Christianity is a crutch for the weak has never read these words!

SUNDAY MORNING AT 9:45 am.

Searching for Happiness

Who isn't it? Most people I know want it – happiness. The wise author of the Book of Ecclesiastes affirms the desire, **I know that there is nothing better for them (people) than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live. (Eccl. 3:12)** The search for happiness is in our DNA. Finding happiness is not. And so we search for it. Perhaps this class can help. The author of the book we are reading together, Martin Thielen, believes that there are nine things we can do that will cultivate happiness in our inner being. A happiness not dependent on circumstances, finances, appearance, or anything else. Nine things all of us can do to find the happiness we are seeking. We have wonderful, non-threatening discussions. Please join us when you can.

Moment for Stewardship

Pew Envelopes -

- What do they represent?
- Why are they there?
- Where do the contributions go?
- When do we use them?
- For whom?

Answers forthcoming

QUESTIONS WE MUST ASK OURSELVES

Pastor's Report delivered at the Annual Congregational Meeting, January 27:

"Let's start at the very beginning, a very good place to start," sang Julie Andrews to nearly every person living in America back in 1965. I still like that song. I imagine many of you do as well. Let's do it. Let's start at the very beginning and listen to the words of Jesus as if for the first time. (From *The Message*)

"Time's up! God's kingdom is here. Change your life and believe the Message."

Passing along the beach of Lake Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew net-fishing. Fishing was their regular work. Jesus said to them, "Come with me. I'll make a new kind of fisherman out of you. I'll show you how to catch men and women instead of perch and bass." They didn't ask questions. They dropped their nets and followed.

They dropped their nets and followed. Boom. God makes all things new. The people brave enough to follow became the first disciples. They had to meet two requirements: first, drop the nets; second, follow Jesus wherever he went, no questions asked. Do it now.

When I put ourselves in the story, we ask ourselves: do we still want to follow Jesus? what must we drop? what must we leave behind? where is Jesus leading us? Could it be that we are called to leave behind the way we have always done church? Could it be we are called to drop the net we have been throwing into the water for so many years and find a new one. After all, the net we have been using is not pulling in many new people. I do not believe the problem is with us. I do not believe the water is the problem. (We can't change the water anyway!) The problem is the net. Should I, should we, drop it?

As disciples of Jesus in a mainline denomination, we have re-visioned, re-imagined, and re-evaluated our ministries for decades. The truth is, we still are not growing our numbers. It is true that we are still following Jesus (yeah!) but with fewer resources, tired volunteers, less money, and in the same big, beautiful, expensive buildings. IF Jesus is still calling us to drop our nets and follow him, I wonder what that means in today's world? I wonder if we are brave enough to do it. A few thoughts occur:

- This big beautiful building, once a tremendous net for ministry, is a problem, a burden.
- We could leave this building and merge with another church. The most successful mergers occur when a smaller congregation moves its members and resources to a larger one.
- We could work with other churches in the area and share a pastor. That, essentially, is what our Roman Catholic brethren are doing.
- We could lease our space to another church or organization who would help maintain it.
- We could leave the building behind. The church I served in Arlington saved the worship space and sold the rest of the building to a developer who renovated it into affordable housing.
- We could sell this building to a developer and find another worship space that fits our budget.
- We could keep on doing what we are doing and wait to see what happens. We aren't doing any-thing wrong. We aren't the problem.

I want to begin a prayerful, thoughtful conversation about what it would mean for us to drop our nets and follow Jesus today. I'd like to meet with a group of 5—7 people who could lead us through the conversation. We would begin our work soon. (If you are interested, call me.)

My son, Desmond, at 17, is at the beginning of his life. Like most youth his age, he is trying to figure out how to share his joy, his gifts, and his love for the world effectively and still make a living. Not an easy thing to do. For any of us, regardless of our age. Sometimes Desmond gets stuck and curls up with his headphones under the covers of his bed for a week or so. Then he reappears and begins to move forward again. Recently he emerged and posted something on his Instagram page that inspired me. *"The missing piece is great motivation. Don't spoil your art before you even hit the canvas."* In other words, don't self-sabotage. Don't judge an idea as unworthy before it takes root. We are following a bold Savior and in the hands of a God who will not forsake us. So, brothers and sisters, let's start at the very beginning—a very good place to start.



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