

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Romans 1:7

SERMON THEME: "Our Purpose In Life"

SERMON TEXT: Matthew 5:16 (Read first)

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The parish ministry is full of surprises, but few have impressed me more than an experience I had with a group of about 14 junior high age students at a youth meeting at a former congregation. Some were members, and some friends that our kids brought along to the meeting on a Sunday evening.

I had been asked to lead a devotion, and during the course of it I asked, "What is the most important goal or endeavor in life?" I put columns on a board with headings that included several options: success, fame, becoming rich or powerful, service to one's fellowman, service to God and the like. They were to come up and initial under their choice. We had a clear majority consensus. Much to my amazement and concern nearly all said that making money would be their life's goal! Imagine our Christian young people answering this way!

I pose a similar question to you. What *is* our purpose in life? Why is the human species perpetuated? Is the purpose of an individual life any different from the purpose of mankind as a whole? Just how important is making money, or success or any other worldly achievement in relation to our God-given purpose in life? What place shall we rightfully give to pleasure, entertainment, leisure time activity, and retirement? How important, really, is it that we accrue and care for material things? How much emphasis should we place on temporal security—having property paid for, adequate financial resources, good health and other insurance? Just what is, or should be, important to us?

Maybe we can sum up all of these questions with one final question: Is our main focus on ourselves, or on the God of the Bible? Just how do we see ourselves in the light of God's Word?

To begin our meditation we need a starting point. God's Word provides a good one: "For we are His workmanship *created in*

Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). Our beginning was planned. We are divinely structured, our purpose fore-ordained. As God told Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you" (1:5). We are God's handiwork; we are here because the LORD God created us! We are a holy creation, not accidents of nature! And we were made for a specific reason. Scripture, as you just heard, plainly answers the question, "Why are we here?"

We were created to do good works; born to love! This is why God put us here! Sadly, tragically, we were flawed from birth. Not because the Creator made a mistake, but because our first parents did. God created them in His own image, holy, without sin. He gave them a free will, freedom to choose between good and evil. Tempted by satan, they believed his lie and chose to disobey the God who made them. Immediately their nature was corrupted, and we have inherited that nature—original sin, we call it. And all of us, the Bible says, have committed the same crime, actual sin; we have all listened to the tempter and have transgressed the righteous precepts of God! Since we have all gone astray, the purpose for which God created us has become obscured. We tend to lose sight of why we're really here.

Apart from faith in God and being corrupted by sin, all our deeds, even our good works, are unacceptable to Him. Isaiah said it, "We are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteous deeds are like filthy rags" (64:6). The end result of sin is death, both physical and spiritual. The body dies, the soul of the impenitent sinner goes to an everlasting hell. His good deeds are for naught because he didn't love God.

This is where the unspeakably wonderful grace of God enters in! He knew our helplessness to save ourselves. He had mercy! He had compassion! He did not stop loving His creations—and that's all of us! He promised already as soon as sin appeared that He would send a Savior, One who would crush satan and save every sinner ever born! And that He did! You know how the predictions of the prophets were fulfilled in the Christmas story. A Savior was born, who was Christ the Lord! He would live a perfect—a sinless—life in our place! He would love us. He

would die the death we deserved to atone for our sins! And He would rise again to put an end to sin, death, and the devil!

The central teaching of the Christian religion—God’s religion—is that we are justified freely by the grace of God through a living faith in Jesus Christ! By His stripes we are healed! It all comes by the work of the Holy Spirit who changes our hearts, who leads us to repentance, who recreates us, once again restoring us to the holy image of God! Through Holy Baptism, by the nurture and instruction of His holy Word, we are transformed from sinner to saint. Death no longer brings fear, but the joyful anticipation of a heavenly glory!

Paul, writing to Titus, sums it up beautifully: “For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for Himself a people of His own who are zealous for good deeds” (Titus 2:11-14).

There you have it! We’ve come full circle back to our purpose in life! Now the words we heard earlier in Ephesians 2 are reaffirmed and made crystal clear; we are “created in Christ Jesus for good works...” And in the Titus passage, God has cleansed us from all iniquity so we may serve with zeal and joy, doing works that are acceptable to God, and glorify His holy name! We haven’t done anything to make our works pleasing to Him; He has removed the barrier of sin and has changed us in a way that gives us the ability to love and the desire to carry out His holy will!

Good works begin with God Himself. He saved us by His grace; He has empowered us to believe, to repent of sin, to behave as the children He created us to be! God’s good works have not only saved our souls, *but have given purpose to our lives!*

Our Lord, the Father who created us and the Son who died and rose again for our justification, has shown us that the chief good work, the highest good deed of all, is LOVE! If our good works are to have meaning and permanence, if our works are not to be in vain, then we, too, must make love our aim; love for God, love

for everyone! Knowing that it is impossible to please God without faith in Jesus (Hebrews 11:6), the good that we do is always in His precious name! It is when we have a personal relationship with God's Son, then our works please and glorify our Father in heaven! This is the first step to doing that which magnifies all God has done to redeem mankind from sin.

This brings us back to our plain-spoken text: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." So what should come to mind when we hear the words of our theme, "Our Purpose In Life"? The answer's right in front of us; even the little children sing the words, "This little light of mine, I'm gonna' let it shine..." Every soul who confesses the name of Jesus and believes everything He says, hopefully can see what we should be doing when we leave here today, and everyday!

"Our Purpose In Life" is to do the loving works which give glory to the Father who created us, the Son who redeemed us, and the Holy Spirit who has sanctified us and keeps us in the one, true faith! In what ways do we glorify Him? By what is in our hearts, by the words we speak, by our regular worship life, our family life, and the way we interact with our neighbor, our co-worker, our employer or employee, our fellow students and teachers, the stranger we meet in the store or on the street, even the government... Every truly good work is *love and faith in action*, and it is in loving as God first loved us that we let our light shine in a way that people can look at us and see Jesus!

When we were born again, regenerated, the Lord began a process in us, spiritual growth, sanctification—becoming more and more like Jesus Himself! Luther's descriptive term, "Little Christs", well applies! As our love for God and one another grows, and our faith is strengthened through Word and Sacrament, we *should* be the image of Jesus—so much so that people see us as set apart, not of the world! Our conduct in every respect should glorify the Lord of hosts at all times and in all places: At home, on the job, in school, anywhere in public, and certainly in the temple of God! We should inspire people in such a way that they, too, will want to know Jesus and be like Him! And the more people who love Jesus, the more God is glorified!

Jesus Himself sought to glorify His Father. We see this in His High Priestly prayer, spoken on the eve of His betrayal: "Father, the hour has come; glorify the Son, that the Son may glorify Thee..." (John 17:1). His prayer, of course, was answered. In His death and resurrection both the Son and the Father were glorified, then, now and forever! Each received the glory due for their good work of salvation—the supreme act of love! Our worship today is a good work; in word, song, confession, the Holy Supper, and our fellowship, we are honoring, thanking, praising, rededicating ourselves to Christ—all to the eternal glory of our God!

We continue throughout the week to give glory in thought, word and deed, fulfilling the very purpose for which we were created! We remember that we are NOT justified by good works, but by faith, at the same time knowing that our acts of love will find their reward in heaven! There, with the patriarchs of old, our loved ones who have gone ahead, and the holy angels, we will continue forever magnifying and blessing our God with resounding hymns of praise and unending Hallelujahs!

Meanwhile, in the short time we have left, it is our calling and joy to let our light shine before men by doing works rooted in love which give all glory to our Father in heaven! This, my friends is "Our Purpose In Life"! In Jesus' name, Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding will keep your hearts and minds through a living faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Rev. Donald P. Tonack

