

Accomplished

Luke 9:28-36
February 27, 2022

First Presbyterian Church
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In July 1969, President Nixon was given the following statement written by his speechwriter, William Safire, concerning the Apollo 11 spaceflight:

“Fate has ordained that the men who went to the moon to explore in peace will stay on the moon to rest in peace. These brave men, Neil Armstrong and Edwin [Buzz] Aldrin, know that there is no hope for their recovery. But they also know that there is hope for mankind in their sacrifice.”

Of course, those familiar with this historic event know that the astronauts did not die in space but returned to earth as the first to ever set foot on the surface of the moon, and that Safire wrote the speech just in case. The Apollo 11 moon landing was an unbelievable accomplishment for humankind.

And it shows us that our greatest accomplishments in life – all such accomplishments – don’t just happen, but rather they come as the culmination of your goals, vision, encouragement, assistance and determination, all of it by the grace of God.

In today’s New Testament lesson, Jesus is preparing for the culmination of his earthly ministry. He’s on the mountain with Peter, John and James, speaking with Moses and Elijah of his departure, which, says Luke, “he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.” Of course, Luke is talking about the resurrection, Jesus’ moon-shot accomplishment, if you will.

Everyone has things they hope to accomplish in life. Some of them take a lifetime to achieve. And all of them – everything you’ve ever achieved and those things you hope to accomplish – they all follow a similar pattern.

Jesus reveals this pattern through the events surrounding his transfiguration on the mountaintop. If there’s anything you have yet to accomplish in life – anything at all – take a moment right now to think about it, bring it to mind, even whisper it to yourself. Now, keep that goal or that thing you have to get done in mind as together we look at the pattern of events surrounding the transfiguration of Jesus, a pattern that lends itself to any true accomplishment in life.

The first things we see is a sense of ambition. Luke begins by saying, “Now about eight days after these sayings, Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray.”

What's the significance of the eight days – “eight days after these sayings”? Why does Luke mention it? It's because the eighth day is the first day of the week, right? Seven days in a week and on the eighth day, you start something new – a new goal for that week.

Every new week, every new day is an opportunity to begin again with a sense of ambition, a list of things you'd like to accomplish, the hope that this week, this day will be worth living, will amount to something.

How great or how small that something is is up to you. I mean, God surely has something out ahead for you, but if you're not open to discovering it, claiming it, moving toward it, it's not going to happen.

So why not start each new day, each new week with a sense of ambition, something you feel called to work toward, something you know that needs to be done, and then move forward with that goal in mind. Once we've made a goal, we need to begin cultivating a vision of what it looks like to achieve that goal. For Jesus, it was a whole new self, a complete makeover, a new way of being.

Luke tells us that “while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white.” That's Jesus' vision of the resurrection, a vision he shared with his three closest disciples. and with Moses and Elijah, who, as Luke says, “appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure,” his resurrection and ascension.

There's not one of us here who can accomplish anything in life without a sense of ambition, the vision to carry it out, and the support of others. The support of others is the third thing that Jesus shows us as essential in accomplishing anything in life.

That goal you're thinking of, that thing you'd like to accomplish, that milestone out ahead of you – you'll never reach it unless you enlist the support of others. Jesus had the disciples journeying with him throughout his earthly ministry, and he made a point to share with them his vision for what he planned to accomplish. Jesus found it necessary to share his vision with others. Why wouldn't you?

Who in your life can you enroll in your plans to accomplish your goal and your vision of what that might look like? You'd be surprised how just sharing your goal, your vision with someone- with everyone- will help to breathe life into it, help it to come about. If you have any ambition in life, anything you'd like to accomplish, anything you've got to get done, share it with others and generate some movement in that direction.

The next thing Luke tells us is that “Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep.” Here's where determination comes in. You have to have a sense of determination.

Everyone gets tired, weighed down by worry, worn out by the struggle. But we persevere. We keep our ambitions and goals before us, cast that vision out ahead of us, share it with others to gain their support, and then we move forward with a sense of determination. Because Peter, John and James didn't give into their sleepiness but stayed awake, Luke tells us "they saw Jesus' glory and the two men who stood with him," Moses and Elijah. And seeing this, Peter says, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah' – not knowing what he said."

Here, Peter is on the wrong track, moving in the wrong direction – having Jesus stay on the mountain. That's not the vision Jesus has for his life. His goal, his purpose is bigger than any mountain.

And yet, sometimes we do get sidetracked, don't we? We head in the wrong direction and abandon our goals. That's life. Few people reach all the goals they set. But those goals that just won't let go of us, and those things we just have to get done – there's no abandoning them. They're always with us.

So why not take this moment right now to recommit yourself to that goal. Maybe it's completing your education, getting a job or a promotion. Maybe your goal is family oriented, or travel related – someplace you'd like to go. Maybe you'd like to downsize your living situation, pay off your mortgage, plan for retirement, start a new hobby, volunteer in the community or at church, deepen your faith. These are big goals in life, and they won't just happen on their own.

Whenever we have big goals in life – something that will change who we are, what we do, where we can go in life – we need some reassurance along the way. Even Jesus and the disciples needed reassurance along the way. And they got it.

Luke tells us that while Peter was suggesting they just stay where they are, "a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, 'This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!'"

God brought reassurance to Peter, James and John – and even Jesus as he embraced the cross. No one accomplishes anything worth doing without some reassurance along the way. So let this be your reassurance. God is with you in whatever you're called to accomplish in life, whatever you truly have to do.

Wednesday is the start of Lent, the season of drawing closer to God by taking on a new goal. Why not take this opportunity to recommit to that next big thing in your life. That goal you have, the ambition God has put in your heart – don't give up on it.

Instead, enter into Lent keeping the vision alive in your heart, sharing it with those who can be of support, maintaining your determination, seeking and accepting redirection when needed, and relying on the assurance of God, confident in God's timetable for your life. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Holy God, your people need you. They need your love, your grace and your unending mercy. They need to know your truth, to experience your peace, and to share it the world over, and especially in Ukraine and Russia, across Europe and the United States, throughout the world, Lord.

God, your people need your guidance and your wisdom. They need your strength.

God, they need all of these things, and we know that you can give us all that we need. But, God, let us never pursue only the things that you can give. Give us of yourself first. Draw us to you only. We need you. We love you. We desire you.

We ask your spirit of comfort and healing upon those dealing with illness and disease. We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace and Lord of lords, who taught us to pray together, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**