

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin
June 2, 2019 – Celebration of the Ascension of our Lord

One Journey Can Change Your Life: The Journey Gives Meaning to Life

Luke 24:44-53

⁴⁴ He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.⁴⁶ He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day,⁴⁷ and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

⁵⁰ When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. ⁵¹ While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. ⁵² Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. ⁵³ And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

I'd like to talk with you today about lawn mowing. I spent five hours last weekend, mowing lawn.

Now I could talk to you about "the what" of lawn mowing. What was I doing? I wasn't racing lawn mowers. I spent over an hour walking behind one like this and almost four hours riding something like this.

I could talk to you about "the how" of lawn mowing, that I like to alternate directions when I mow, sometimes mowing east and west, sometimes north and south, sometimes on a diagonal. I could talk to you about how my son's lawn got away from him so I could only cut a 1/3 swath every time.

But "the what" and "the how" are not the most important things. I really want to talk to you about "the why."

Why did I spend five hours mowing my lawn?

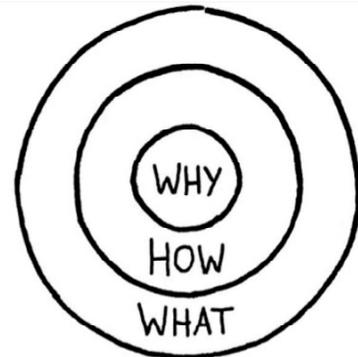
- Because I love my wife. I don't want her to have to come home to a lawn that is overgrown.
- Because I love my son. I saw that this was something I could do to help him.

- Because I love my neighbors. I want them to see that I'm trying to be a good neighbor to them.
- Ultimately it is because I love my Savior. Even through my lawn mowing, I want to be his witness to those around me.

You see, short grass is not the goal. The goal is really “the why.” I want to show my love to others, and to the Savior.

I have to give credit to this outline to Simon Sinek and his TED Talk “Start with The Why.”

He explains that most often we start with “the what” and “the how.” But what inspires us, what gives meaning to life is not the what and the how, but the why.



By the way, this is my advertisement for the Global Leadership Summit simulcast that we will be hosting here at St. Paul's in our Trinity Gym on Thursday, August 8 and Friday, August 9. I first heard Simon Sinek and a host of other gifted speakers at the Global Leadership Summits that I have attended. I would encourage you to attend because, humanly speaking, the health of God's Church and your Family Church depends on the strength of you as a leader.

Now, back to “the why.”

So often we start with the what and the how.

What are we supposed to do? According to this text, we are supposed to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins.

Who of us hasn't heard that and felt guilt. Some of you may feel guilty because someone suggested you should be a full-time church worker. Now that you are not, you are not being faithful to this call to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins.

Some of you are like me. When I was a missionary starting a new church, I knocked on thousands of doors. But most of the time, in all those door knockings, I never got to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins. I just made friendly visits, getting to know people. In the mission board report, a one or a zero on the “How many gospel presentations this month” line was pretty demoralizing.

You may not have knocked on many doors, but nearly all of you know someone who is involved in an on-going sin. It may be a family member who has moved in with a girlfriend or boyfriend. It may be a friend who constantly uses foul language. It may be a co-worker who is constantly gossiping.

You and I have the call to “preach repentance and forgiveness of sins.” But we don’t call that person to repentance. We don’t get to “forgiveness of sins.” And so we are a failure.

But rather than start with “the what,” let’s start with “the why.” Start with “the why” of Jesus’ life.

In our lesson for today, we find the disciples confused, unsure about the purpose of their own lives. They thought their purpose was just to follow Jesus as he led them to the glory of the kingdom of God. But the last few days had destroyed that dream. Jesus was crucified. They had heard reports that Jesus had risen, but they hadn’t seen him.

Now, suddenly, on Easter evening, Jesus appears in their midst. He shows them his hands and side. And then what did he do?

He took them on a journey to the empty tomb where we started this Easter season.

“This is what I told you while I was still with you. Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ or Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day.”

He started with his own “why.” Why did all this happen? Because God had foretold it. Because all along God had told his people that evil was in the world and that he was going to deal with that evil once and for all through the Seed of the Woman who would crush Satan’s head. Jesus explained that everything they had just seen was “the why” of his coming. He had come to conquer evil, and the ultimate evil of death.

When you are struggling to find meaning in your life, go back to the empty tomb with Jesus. See that it all happened just as God had foretold.

And what is our purpose? “You are witnesses of these things.”

My purpose in everything that I do is to be a witness to what has been revealed to me. That’s why I spent five hours mowing lawn last weekend. It was part of my being a witness of these things.

This is what our congregation’s mission statement is really all about. “By every possible means we bring every person within our area of influence closer to Christ.” By every possible means speaks to our congregation’s willingness to experiment with new ministries, from our three worship languages, to our entrance into the parental choice program, to our planting of Victory of the Lamb 10 years ago and now our desire to start another worship site, basically another congregation united with us.

But “by every possible means” also speaks to our personal lives. That everything we do is part of our effort to be a witness, that by our lives, by our every interaction at work, by our interactions with our neighbors, by our friendships, by sharing hobbies, by everything we do, we want to do it in a way that says, “I’ve seen something that has changed my life. I’ve seen that Jesus’ tomb was empty. I’ve seen that he is my Savior. So now my life, my resources, my time, my strengths, they are all dedicated to him.”

“The Why” of our lives as witnesses in all that we do is summed up in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15. I’m encouraging you to memorize it over the next week.

“For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.”

When we understand “the why” of our lives, “the how” and “the what” come relatively easily.

“Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”

“All nations.” At first glance this can be overwhelming. But in reality it is freeing. All nations. This isn’t a message just for some. It is a message for all people. In our mission statement, it is “every person within our area of influence.”

That’s why we talk about every interaction we have being part of our witness. Being a witness of Jesus’ resurrection doesn’t just happen on Sundays or when we are doing church work or when we are wearing our St. Paul’s gear at Jammin’ on Janesville.

The entire purpose of my journey is to reflect that I have gone out to the empty tomb and I believe that Jesus died for me and rose again.

But who is up to such a task. So Jesus makes a promise, “I am going to send you what my Father has promised, but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” We know that this promise was first fulfilled on Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit empowered the disciples to speak up with courage.

That promise continues to be fulfilled in us, as in these last days the Holy Spirit is poured out on us as we study God’s Word

Let me use an example of my coffee cup. Can you see any coffee in my coffee cup? Not visible is it. But if I keep pouring coffee into the cup, pretty soon it starts to overflow my cup and it is visible to everyone.

The same is true about our purpose in life, to be witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection. How do we let others see in us that Jesus is alive? It begins by being filled with the Holy Spirit. The more you are in the word, the more you go back over and over again and see that the tomb is empty, the more the Holy Spirit will fill you to overflowing, and the people around us will see it.

And finally we get to “the what.” Witnessing is speaking words of repentance and forgiveness of sins. So often I hear us talking about getting trained to be witnesses. Training is good. But the best training is to make it simple. How many of you know John 3:16? Can you recite it?

Now let’s read it together. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

This isn’t hard. What is hard is when we try to force this conversation. At one summer job, there was a co-worker that no one wanted to work with. He was called “the preacher.” He tried to force his faith into every conversation. I got to work with him a lot because everyone knew I was studying to be a pastor, and I could “put up” with him.

He preached repentance and forgiveness of sins. But no one listened. Because he was forcing that conversation.

How different that is from Peter’s comment in 1 Peter 3: “Always be prepared to give an answer for the reason for the hope that you have, but do this with gentleness and respect.”

Live in a way that the Spirit is overflowing in your life. Fill yourself with God’s word and promises, so that others see that Spirit overflowing in your life, and when God fills their heart with questions, you have the answer which can be as simple as John 3:16. Repentance and forgiveness of sins. Yes, I am a sinner. Yes, I know that God loves me. Yes, I know that God loves you because you are part of the world. Jesus died for you. You are forgiven. Believe it.

Brothers and sisters, let’s take the pressure off of ourselves. It doesn’t depend on us. It doesn’t depend on our ability to force Jesus into conversations and it doesn’t depend on our great oratorical skill. It depends on the Holy Spirit working in us, and letting him pour out into the world around us through him.

So today, as we celebrate Jesus’ ascension into heaven, let’s appreciate the last words of our lesson.

⁵⁰ When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. ⁵¹ While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. ⁵² Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. ⁵³ And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

Receive Jesus’ blessing. See that he has ascended and now sits at the right hand of God from which he can pour out his powerful Holy Spirit on us. And let’s just keep coming back here, worshiping the Savior with great joy. And just as he did for the apostles, so he will do for us, he will send us out where and when he knows is best. He will have us interact with the people that he has chosen at the time that he knows is right. Just remember “the why.” Why are you here? In every interaction, whether mowing a lawn or rocking a baby or talking at work, you are a witness. You have seen the tomb is empty. Keep that foremost in your mind and heart, and others will see it in you and ask for the reason for the hope that you have. Amen.

My Next Steps on the Journey

- **Remember “The Why” of your life. Memorize 2 Corinthians 5:14-15.** “For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.”
- **Remember “The How” of your life. Memorize Matthew 10:20.** “It will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”
- **Remember “The What” of your life. Memorize John 3:16.** “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”
- **Remember “The Why” of your life. Increase your influence.** Register for the Global Leadership Summit at StPaulMuskego.org/GLS using Priority Code PV2019 before the price increase on June 25.

GroupWork

1. Share your personal summer plans with the group. Talk about when you might get together as a group for a fun activity.
2. This weekend we celebrated that Jesus ascended to the right hand of God with all power and authority given to him. Read Matthew 28:18-20.
 - a. What are some of the challenges you think that the apostles faced as they traveled the world?
 - b. What are some of the challenges the church faces today?
 - c. What are some of the challenges you face as a witness of Jesus’ death and resurrection?
 - d. Jesus announced that all authority or power had been given to him. How would that promise of power comfort the apostles and how does it comfort us as we face challenges in our call to be witnesses?
3. Read Acts 7:54-60. Stephen faced the ultimate challenge. How did the vision God gave Stephen prepare him for his death? How does it help you?
4. Read Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 1:15-23. Focusing on verses 20-23, what phrases are important for you to remember as you face the challenges of being a witness of Jesus’ death and resurrection to the world?
5. For whom do you want the group to pray that “the eyes of your heart may be enlightened” (Ephesians 1:18) because they face significant challenges in their life? After sharing these names, close by praying together Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 1:15-23 with these individuals in mind.