

## **“Purpose of Your Life”**

Ephesians 2:1-10

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When I was a seminary student, an Old Testament professor shared this fun story. The story goes like this: One day in the Garden of Eden, Eve calls out to God: "God, I have a problem!" "What's the problem, Eve?" "God, I know you created me and provided this beautiful garden and all of these wonderful animals and that hilarious comedic snake, but I'm just not happy." "Why is that, Eve?" came the reply from above. "God, I am lonely, and I'm sick to death of apples." "Well, Eve, in that case, I have a solution. I shall create a man for you." "What's a man, God?" "This man will be a flawed creature, with many bad traits. He'll lie, cheat and be vain and glorious; all in all, he'll give you a hard time. But... he'll be bigger, and faster, and will like to hunt and kill things. He will look silly when he's aroused, but since you've been complaining, I'll create him in such a way that he will satisfy your physical needs. He will be witless and will revel in childish things like fighting and kicking a ball about. He won't be too smart, so he'll need your advice to think properly." "Sounds great," says Eve, with an ironically raised eyebrow. "What's the catch, God?" "Well... you can have him on one condition." "What's that, God?" "As I said, he'll be proud, arrogant and self-admiring... So you'll have to let him believe that I made him first. Just remember, it's our little secret... you know, woman to woman." At first, I thought he was talking about a new theory.

This morning, I would like to talk about creating a “purpose oriented life.” It doesn’t matter whether God created a man for Eve or a woman for Adam. The more important thing is to know that God didn’t create us without purpose. We are not here by ‘accident’, but we believe God had us in mind, and God planned us for His great purpose. When I was at school, I studied many different kinds of philosophical doctrines in history. Nihilism was one of the interesting philosophies around the 19th century. This philosophy doesn’t admit any meaning aspects of life. It argues that life is without objective, meaning and purpose. For example, Nihilism describes our life journey this way, “As soon as you are kicked out of your mother’s womb, you are running back towards a time of death.” Intellectually, it may make some sense, but who loves this understanding unless you are hurt or hopeless about your life. No one loves and adopts this pessimistic view of life for their philosophy. There is no hope and meaning for life in this thought. If it is true that life has no meaning, it is hard to bear. For us, since life has meaning and worth, while we live, even in the midst of struggles, we can bear almost anything. Meaning comes from purpose, and

purpose comes from God. In other words, without God, life has no purpose, and without purpose, life has no meaning. Without meaning, life has no significance or hope. Hope comes from having a purpose. Christianity is about hope for life, faith in God and love from God.

Today's Scripture reading is a concise version of the Apostle Paul's theological understanding about our Christianity, such as "sin, grace and Jesus Christ" as basic cores in our faith. As you know, the Apostle Paul established many new churches as a missionary like churches in Rome, Corinth and Ephesus, and he wrote many letters to each church for strengthening them and confirming their Christian faith in difficult times. Our reading is a part of Paul's full letter to a church in Ephesus, which is located on the west coast of the Roman province of Asia (Asia Minor - what is now Turkey). There was a big temple (one of the seven wonders in the ancient world) of the Greek goddess, Artemis (Artemis in Latin, it means "Dianna"). There were a large number of Jews as well. In many ways, this Christian community was small and weak. Now, the Apostle Paul, being in prison in Rome, wrote this letter to the Ephesians for encouragement and strength in faith. This morning, I want to be clear with you about "sin, grace and good works" in view of God's purpose in our life when He made us in His image.

Let's revisit our Scripture's text. You don't have to remember anything else, but focus on verse 5. Paul wanted to remind the Ephesians and us of what he believes. Verse 5 says, "You were dead through the trespasses and sins, made us alive together with Christ-by grace you have been saved." In the Bible, the word "sin" helps us to understand who we are in our relationship with God. Do you comprehend what exactly "sin" is? It is a pretty hard theological concept. I researched the understanding of "sin" in other faith traditions. First of all, Islam sees sin as anything that goes against the will of Allah. Islam teaches that sin is an act and not a state of being. The concept of Buddhist ethics is not based upon duty towards any deities. While there is no Buddhist equivalent of the Christian concept of sin, sin itself, or wrongdoing, is recognized in Buddhism. In Western Christianity, "sin is lawlessness" and so salvation tends to be understood in legal terms, similar to Jewish law. It has damaged, and completely severed, the relationship of humanity to God. That relationship can only be restored through repentance unto Christ and acceptance of Jesus Christ and his death on the cross as a sacrifice for mankind's sin.

I will approach the word "Sin" a little different way. In the Old Testament Bible, "Sin" means "transgression" which means, "to step across" or "to go beyond a set boundary or limit." This concept can be compared to an athletic playing field with lines delineating the boundaries within which the game is played. When a player crosses over those boundary lines, he has committed a "transgression" and gone out of bounds. Limits are set that define the playing

area, and the players are to stay within the limits of that area. In the New Testament, the word of "Sin" means, "to miss the mark." Again, to use a sports analogy, this is an archery term. When you fired at a target and missed the bull's eye, the scorekeeper yelled, 'Sin!' It meant, 'You are off the mark.' This view of sin includes the concept of our going in one direction but straying off course to the side and not continuing in the direction we intended to go, with the result that we don't reach the goal we intended.

There is an interesting story about our efforts to overcome and remove "Sin". Our faith journey as Christians can be compared to the story of a sculptor chipping away at an enormous block of stone. Another man asks him what he's sculpting, and the sculptor replies, "An elephant." The other man then asks, "How do you sculpt an elephant?" The sculptor considers the question, then says: "It's really very simple. You just chip away anything that doesn't look like an elephant." Our goal is, with God's help, is grace, grace as God's free gift, to chip away everything that isn't like God.

Throughout the life of the individual and church as a community, we are on a journey to discover the meaning of life, finding out God's great purpose for each of us. Although we were created for God's glory, due to our "Sin," we were off the direction and became lost. As Paul says in our Scripture reading, "God made us alive together with Christ - by grace," because God has a great plan and a purpose for us. By the grace of God, we were able to come back on a right track and to continue on a right direction. God loves you because God made you very special for his great purpose." Do you know how special you are? I have a reading for you, reminding you of how special and precious you are in God's eye:

*I'm special. In all the world there is nobody like me. Since the beginning of time, there has never been another person like me. Nobody has my smile. Nobody has my eyes, my nose, my hair, my hands, my voice. I'm special. In all of time, there has been one who laughs like me, no one who cries like me. And what makes me laugh and cry will never provoke identical laughter and tears from anybody else, ever...*

*I'm the only one in all of creation who has my set of abilities, Oh, there will always be somebody who is better at one of the things I'm good at, but no one in the universe can reach the quality of my combination of talents, ideas, abilities and feelings. Through all of eternity, no one will ever look, talk, walk, think, or do like me. I'm special! I'm rare!*

*And, as in all rarity, there is great value. Because of my great rare value, I need not attempt to imitate others. I will accept, yes, celebrate my differences.*

*I'm special. And I'm beginning to realize it's no accident that I'm special. I'm beginning to see that God made me special for a very special purpose. He must have a job for me that no one else can do so well as I. Out of all the billions of*

*applicants, only one is qualified, only one has the right combination of what it takes. That one is me. Because - I'm special!*

God sent His only Son, Jesus Christ to “save us” and continued with us to help us stay on the right direction because we were off track. We had lost our way, and we forgot God’s purpose. Jesus’ sacrificial act of love, his death on the cross, was a strong token of God’s gracious help and assistance even though God has no responsibility on our faults, our wanderings “off the mark.” Paul reminds us that God helped us and saved us not by our own doings, but through grace, the “gift of God”- not the result of works. God’s love redirects us back to pursue of our life's purpose. When God created you and me, God invested His great purpose in each of us. In this sense, our goal in life is to find out the purpose of our life that God planned for you and me. If you want to live your life for your own goals, comfort and pleasure, I am sorry for your self-centered life, but this life will be your choice. What do you want to be and how do you want to be remembered? Is it just for you or for others?

In the end of our Scripture reading, Paul talks about God’s great purpose saying, “For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.” We are created for doing “good works.” When we were “off the mark,” God saved us to restore us back to His direction so that we can continue to find out His purpose of our life. John Wesley taught us three simple rules as a Methodist: “Do no harm, Do good, and Stay in love with God.” Please, find your purpose of life in doing good works. What do you want life to be and how do you want to be remembered by your children or friends when you leave your loved ones? When our church was established in 1895 and relocated here in 1954, there must have been God’s great purpose for our church. What did God want our church to be for our neighborhood and for the world? I hope that we can continue to ask this question and find it someday. While I was reading our Fair Oaks history and documents, I found our church vision (adopted by church council on October 11, 2000 and updated November 2006): “Fair Oaks UMC is a community where worship, people and projects are intentionally grounded in the Christian faith. Everyone is welcome. Together we love, grow, heal, learn and serve.” These couple of sentences are still echoing and lingering in my heart: “Everyone is welcome no matter who you are in this church” and “we will love, grow, heal and serve one another for you and for others.” My hope and prayer is that the purpose of our individual life and church life should continue on in this right direction so that someday, God’s great purpose and plan will be revealed through our lives and through our ministry of Fair Oaks United Methodist Church in our community. Amen.