

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost-Year A

Philippians 3:4b-14; Matthew 21:33-46

“Success in a You Tube world”

October 2nd, 2011

This sermon was preached by Pastor Jim Page at Trinity Lutheran Church

[video: Jill and Kevin wedding dance video on You Tube]

Neat video isn't it? From the looks on the faces of the bridal party and those in attendance at the wedding...that entrance was a success.

Take that video and put it on You Tube and everything changes. Since its inception six years ago, You Tube has provided a means for communication, and sharing of information, never realized before.

From the simple upload of a video...you can effect a company's reputation. When David Carroll had his Taylor guitar broken on an United Airlines flight; he was left in a customer service maze. He didn't sue. He wrote a song about it titled 'United Breaks Guitars', made a video to post on You Tube with the goal of attaining 1 million views. He met the goal in four days. United offered him cash but he asked for it to be given to his favorite charity. United wrote, "His video made us keenly aware that we needed to be more accessible to customers to resolve issues quickly."

The father of 8 year old David recorded his son's demeanor after having dental surgery. After over 100,000,000 views...David has his college savings taken care of.

The Jill and Kevin wedding dance was recorded at Christ Lutheran Church, an ELCA congregation, in St. Paul. Jill's dad wanted to video on You Tube to be shared with relative who couldn't attend the wedding. In the first 48 hours on You Tube, the video had 3.5 million views. The wedding party even received an all expense paid trip to New York to perform the dance on the Today show. It now has over 65 million views.

You Tube...it's all about you, your thoughts, what you've done. Success on You Tube is measured by how many people watch 'you'.

In our reading from Philippians today, the apostle Paul is focused on this theme of 'you'. 'You' in relation to the standards in how we regard success and the life-changing importance of those standards being shaped by our faith in Jesus Christ.

Let's look at these words from Paul. First off, Philippi is located in what today is Greece. The book of Philippians in your Bible is actually a thank you letter from Paul to the Philippians for their support and prayers. This is Paul's most joyful letter of all his writings in the New Testament.

He begins the letter by writing, "I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel."

Paul had reasons for joy. In our lives, we can ask ourselves...how much joy did you experience last week? More specifically, what brings us joy?

The answer for Paul...and for many of us is found in one word....success.

How we regard success is as different as the number of people in this room. Success began as the survival of the fittest. It then evolved to survival with derivative perks compared to everyone else. Life is lived like a sort of You Tube on display for everyone to watch. Look at what I've done. Look at what I have.

There is something within all of us that warms up to human strokes of approval. We are motivated to do more when our efforts are noticed and rewarded.

Every major field has its particular award for outstanding achievement.

Universities award scholarships; companies give bonuses; and winning coaches are affirmed and envied.

Initially, recognition is great, affirming, and well deserved. It leads us to becoming better people in attaining goals. As the old adage goes, there can be too much of a good thing.

The temptation is that success also drives us to do more, to gain greater recognition, better grades, better pay, a higher promotion. Our pursuits begin innocently and can slowly evolve into a way of living that can strip us of our joy. This is where the apostle Paul speaks.

Paul lived that way. And Paul knew how great he was as we heard moments earlier:

“If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a Hebrew, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecutor of the church, as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.”

Go ahead and try and top that.

We do the same thing...regardless of our age. Our culture likes this mentality of doing more, having more compared to others because there's a lot of money being made in making you look, feel, and get noticed by others for being great.

In being honest with ourselves in achieving this kind of success...let's look deep at the situation.

How is your personal life? And what about your marriage? Do you have a sense of inner peace or security?

Peeling back the layers of reason of why success brings us joy gets us to the core...that being pride.

CS Lewis, noted Christian scholar and author, referred to pride as 'the great sin'. It is the one vice of which no one in the world is free.

He wrote, "There is no fault which makes a person more unpopular, and no fault which we are more unconscious of in ourselves."

Pride leads us to feel confident and dependent on ourselves.

Pride leads us to lose our confidence and dependence on God.

We can become trapped in a cycle of living where pride leads us to not ask for help in living differently.

Our relationship with God can easily be based on our achievements.

I pray more. I go to church more. I do this for someone else...and we feel great.

Or, I don't pray as much or attend worship as often as I feel I should...and I'm not proud of that thing I did or what I said to so-and-so last week.

Success in our faith...relying on ourselves...is not joyful and not what God intended.

Paul had all the titles and acclaim...but he wasn't happy. Everything changed for him while out on a walk.

He was walking on the outskirts of a city called Damascus when he was struck blind by a bright light. He then heard a loud voice say, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" In that moment, Paul got a first glimpse of the divine and he was immediately humbled. Everything he earned that he believed brought acclaim from others and especially God, were worthless. One glimpse of God's presence changed his life and gave him a big, awesome, inspiring 'but'.

By a big 'but', we read, **“But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ...and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ.”**

Paul was a radical guy and this is a radical change towards true success for a man who had everything.

God has a unique power in removing our pride, humbling all of us when we think we have everything we need and when we feel we are in control.

Rather than deeming success by societal standards, his life was now shaped by God's gift of love and grace shown in Jesus Christ. Paul sought to know Christ more intimately, draw upon the power of his resurrection increasingly, and be conformed to His image daily.

That is the good news for you today. Regardless of where you are in your journey of faith. Regardless of societies standard of success.

God welcomes you into a relationship with the divine.

A relationship not based on what you have done...but based on what God has done for you in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

An act intended to change how we regard success in wholly depending on God.

Depending on God as a constant presence amid uncertainty and fear.

Depending on God as being faithful when we fall short.

Depending on God as the basis for success as we love and serve those in our midst.

How do we measure success? There are many ways to 'keep score'. As Christians, we do it differently as forgiven sinners who trust in God and give thanks for all that we have.

Just as in a different wedding entrance...different can be a good thing.

Since in a You Tube world...everyone is watching you...may your faith continue to show God's joy in your life.

I would normally end with an 'amen' but it wouldn't be fitting without showing you the joy of being different as the bride and groom come down the aisle.

[video]

Blessings to all of you as you joyfully live out your faith in this You Tube world we live in!

Amen.