

Good Shepherd Anglican Church

Intersection of Factory Road

and Simon Bolivar Drive

St. John's, Antigua

The Twenty-second

Sunday after Pentecost:

Proper 25 (B)

October 24, 2021

A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish

“Pressing on to Achieve Our Education”

The Epistle for Back to School Sunday

Philippians 3:12-16

New International Version

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on

some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One, Have mercy upon us. Amen.

As someone who went back to school when he was 78 years old, my interest in education is pretty obvious. I study medicine many hours a day, take examinations regularly, and love to learn. When I am learning, I am happy, and I feel fulfilled.

So I can affirm the church's interest in having an educated membership. Anglicans have historically upheld education, and at one time any academic professor in England also had to be an ordained Anglican priest. Now, today, the stresses and strains of a very secular society pull our students away from connecting their faith with their studies.

As a young college student, I had to reevaluate my faith, finding that the faith of my parents was not entirely my faith, so I had to rebuild my faith my own way, and that took time. When I moved a few miles away to go to college, my church did not

keep me on its mailing list, and I was too far away to attend, so I was in a bit of a dilemma about where to seek spiritual nurture and guidance. I visited several different congregations of denominations I had only heard of, but I did not find just whatever it was that I was looking for. I was a budding scientist having a chemistry lab in my basement since I was in the sixth grade when my parents gave me a basic chemistry set as a Christmas present. I didn't have many friends close enough to visit, and my family's family were very far away, so I had relatively little guidance once I went to college. I decided early on that I

wanted to be a clergy person, but I also always had an interest in science. Finally, one Sunday my home church invited a professor of inorganic chemistry to preach, he was a well-known speaker on various subjects, and his chosen text was of all things, Sodom and Gomorrah. He knew quite a lot about geothermal reactions and chemical reactions of metals and metal compounds, as it turned out. And his lab routinely would have high temperature melting pots to separate out metals and other compounds from complex mixtures. We call this, “refining”. Naturally discovered gold, for instance, is contaminated with

copper and other minerals and needs to be refined several times to make it purer gold.

Gold melts at lower temperatures than copper, for example, so at a certain temperature gold melts and copper is still a solid. So one can pour off the liquid gold leaving the contaminating copper behind.

Gold melts at 1946 degrees Fahrenheit, and at that temperature copper, zinc, nickel, and lead in the crude gold will bubble to the top of liquid gold and can be poured or skimmed off. (Copper is still a solid up until 1981 degrees.)

Repeating this refining several times produces purer and purer gold.

But of course these are enormous temperatures, as hot as the inside of earth's lava. The lava flows from a volcano vary from 1300 degrees up to 2200 degrees.

These various temperatures are the reasons for 'veins' of various minerals inside of mountains and hills formed by volcanic eruptions long ago.

Table salt also can melt at high temperatures, actually, at 1474 degrees Fahrenheit. So in most volcanic eruptions, salt would be a liquid. Isn't that interesting?

Well, the inorganic chemistry professor and preacher that day knew those intricate mineral details, and he explained how Lot's

wife could be turned into a pillar of salt.

Before I heard his explanation, I was skeptical of that story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, but he explained that in that part of Israel there were once many areas of volcanic activity thousands of years ago, and occupants of towns in that area had to quickly evacuate and run for their lives much as happens even today in areas of volcanic eruptions. One happened in an island near where we live, in Monserrat recently two years ago, if you recall.

In this area of Israel where the two towns of Sodom and Gomorrah there had once been prehistoric salt seas that over time were cut

off from the sea and had dried up many millenia earlier. So the salt settled to the bottom like happens in Salt Lake City, Utah, covering over the underneath molten core of the earth there. The surface of salt was still beneath several layers of rock and dirt, but when this area became volcanic, the lava burst up beneath those old salt lakes and melted the salt and pitched it up into the air as part of the molten liquid from the eruption. And lo and behold, the liquid salt was plentiful since it had a thickness from the ancient sea bed, and the molten salt was thrown skyward along with the lava and was actually part of the lava.

But what goes up....must come down.
So down came the molten salt from the sky.
And if anyone was too near the eruption
they could be caught in the downward rain
of molten liquid salt. And you guessed it.
Lot's wife delayed evacuation staying too
far behind her husband and children and
'bam' down came a blob of liquid salt
covering her with molten salt which quickly
cooled into a pillar of salt.

And at that moment I realized that my
science and my faith were no longer in
separate universes, and the Old Testament
story could be explained by science. It was
an eye-opening experience for me, and my

faith became 'real'. Science and faith could inhabit the same space in our brains. One helps explain the other, as Albert Einstein affirmed: "science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind."

Today is Back to School Sunday. The church is affirming that we need to be educated people of faith. My grandfather, a church member, earned a GED in the US almost a century ago, a General Education Diploma, equivalent to a high school diploma, by studying while he worked supporting his family, and his career greatly was greatly benefitted by that. He became the supervisor of one of the largest dams in

the Tennessee Valley, Wilson Dam, and he got my father a wonderful starting job later in the same organization. And my father's job supported my undergraduate and graduate studies.

So study hard; don't give up; keep your faith, keep learning; and the God of all hope will continually support and care for you all the days of your life through his Son Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

Commentary on the passage from
Philippians, Chapter 3:12-16

<http://natewilsonfamily.net/philippians3.htm>

3:12 ouch hoti (Greek)— to guard against a misunderstanding that he had attained the resurrection of the dead – from v.11 (ATR, R&R).

elabon (Greek, Past Aorist) points back to his conversion experience on the Damascus road (Kent) “not at though by my conversion I did once attain” (Light.).

<https://bcnn1.wordpress.com/2009/04/16/the-spirit-of-excellence-philippians-312-16-by-tony-evans/>

A sermon by Tony Evans:

True ministry can be understood best against the backdrop of mediocrity. When surrounded by others who are unfocused, undisciplined, and unmotivated, a person of excellence distinguishes himself or herself by adhering to God's standards rather than man's. Excellence is performance of the highest quality. A person of excellence can expect God's applause for a job well done.

Christians can achieve excellence in every endeavor for that is the standard God has established. Following are three important points for attainment of excellence.

1. Cherish excellent thoughts. The roots of excellence trace to patterns of excellent thinking. Lofty actions are the result of lofty thinking. Paul advises Christians in Philippians 4:8 to think on godly things – honesty, truth, righteousness, purity, loveliness, goodness, virtuousness, and praise. When we make the conscious decision to pattern our thoughts after godly virtues, we become programmed in

excellence. Establishing a mind-set that imitates the model and manner of Christ holds us to a higher standard than any benchmark man can create.

2. Forget the past. Verse 13 of the text admonishes us to forget yesterday—the good, the bad, and the ugly. The past cannot be changed for better or for worse. We cannot live on yesterday's successes any more than we can dwell on yesterday's failures. We are advised to forgive those who have wronged us. We must remember the lessons learned from the past, but we must not allow the past to dictate our future. Letting go of

yesterdays releases us from guilt, regrets, pain, and pride that may be clouding our tomorrows.

3. Press forward. One of the best ways to forget the past is to move forward. In verse 14 of the text, Paul says that he presses “on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” Likewise, present-day believers must press on to fulfill the call of God. Each of us has a task to accomplish through Christ Jesus. Remaining stationary keeps us tied to the past, but pressing forward releases us from old ties and moves us forward on the path that God

desires for us. Most importantly, we must surround ourselves with people of excellence.

We all want to hear, “Well done, my good and faithful servant,” when this portion of life is over; however, if we have not been good and faithful servants, we will not be able to hear these words. When we seek to meet God’s standard of excellence in everything we do, we find ourselves in the active pursuit of His approval. Like Paul, we have not yet attained excellence, but we should always aspire to the standard set by our Lord and Savior, Christ Jesus. To

achieve God's standard of excellence, we must aspire to the glory of God and the model of Christ.

Let us do further reflection:

1. Developing a lifestyle of excellence begins with a mind-set to settle for nothing less. We must set standards higher than average and surround ourselves with people of excellence. God has called us to excellence for His Kingdom, and everything we do has an effect on the outcome of our efforts. Have you decided to be a person of excellence? Consider the following questions:

What types of books do you read, those that challenge you to think and make a change or those that entertain?

With what types of people do you associate—those who encourage you to do your best or those who are quick to make excuses and blame others for your limitations?

What kinds of television shows do you watch?

To what kinds of music do you listen?

Challenge yourself to become a person of excellence. Develop a list of a few things you want to accomplish or an area in which you want to grow. Keep a journal so you can witness the changes.

Can you name three people that you can identify as people of excellence? Make it a point to visit with them and ask them to share some of the habits they have developed to maintain their standard of excellence. Thank them and pray for them.

If we don't set a goal, it will always be easy to achieve it. But have we really done our best? Have we accomplished something? Have we left our world a better place? Are we calling others to something that is far above us—to the infinite love of Christ?

<https://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vs/PPE/In/5>

Many of Paul's activities in Philippi are recorded in Acts 16:12-40. For example, it was in Philippi that Paul gained his first convert in Europe, the merchant woman Lydia. And it was in Philippi that he was jailed for an exorcism he performed on a slave girl. This was also where the well-known Philippian jailor professed faith in Christ, because he was so moved by Paul's compassion for him.

Paul's ministry in Philippi was so successful that even when he left the city, the Philippian Christians supported Paul sending him monetary gifts at various times when he was in financial need. Listen to Philippians 4:15-16, where Paul wrote about their generosity:

When I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need (Philippians 4:15-16).

The church in Philippi loved Paul, and they regularly helped him with financial gifts.

According to Philippians 4:10, 18, the Philippians also sent Paul a gift close to the time that he wrote his letter to them. Listen to Paul's words there:

At last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it... I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent (Philippians 4:10, 18).

Although there were some Philippian believers who appear to have been

financially secure, the church as a whole was exceptionally poor, so they were not always able to help Paul financially. But when they had the opportunity, they gave to him generously.

And just as the Philippians loved Paul, he felt strong affection for them as well. He loved them for their commitment to the Lord, and for the way they had been his partners in gospel ministry. They were his close friends, people whose fellowship he enjoyed and whose presence he missed.

Listen to the way he spoke to them in Philippians 1:4-8:

In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now ... I have you in my heart ... I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:4-8).

In fact, in Philippians 2:12 and 4:1 Paul referred to the Philippians as his "dear friends," using the Greek word *agapētos*. *Agapētos* is the term Paul commonly used to describe his closest coworkers and beloved friends such as Tychicus, Epaphras, Philemon, Onesimus, and Luke. Paul's love for the Philippian church appears to have

been more particular and specific than his love for many other churches, and it was manifested not only in feelings of belonging and familiarity, but also in a continuing vibrant friendship.

And this should not be surprising. After all, it isn't hard to imagine that there would be a close bond between Paul and Lydia, his hostess; or between Paul and the jailor, whose life he saved; and perhaps even between Paul and the slave girl whom he rescued from demon possession. In all events, Paul had grown to love the believers

in Philippi. And they had the same feelings toward him.

<https://seanisloved.wordpress.com/2020/01/25/press-on-toward-the-goal-philippians-312-16/>

My sermon is entitled “Press On Toward the Goal” and I’ve divided up the sermon into two parts.

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First, I’ll talk about the goal. Here we will consider two questions: “What is the Goal?” and “Are we there yet?”

Second, I’ll talk about pressing on toward the goal. Here I highlight 3 things that are needed as we press on toward the goal: (1) wholehearted effort, (2) focus on your race and Jesus, and (3) persevere for the prize.

1. “What is The Goal?”

In Lewis Carroll’s book, *Alice in Wonderland*, there is a scene where Alice asks for directions from the Cheshire Cat:



'Cheshire Puss,' Alice began, ... 'Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?'

'That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,' said the Cat.

'I don't much care where—' said Alice.

'Then it doesn't matter which way you go,' said the Cat.

'—so long as I get somewhere,' Alice added as an explanation.

'Oh, you're sure to do that,' said the Cat, 'if you only walk long enough.'

Alice asked for directions from the Cat, but the problem was that she herself had no idea where she wanted to go.

And so the Cat wisely answered, "If you don't know and don't care where you end up, then it doesn't matter which way you go."

Because Alice didn't have a **goal**, she was purposeless, and directionless.

Most of us know the power of having a **goal** – it gives us something to aspire toward and motivates us to work hard to try to achieve those goals we set.

We set all kinds of goals in our lives = short term, medium term and long term goals. We set goals for different areas of our lives too = studies, relationships, finances, health, career, etc.

But what about **goals** for our Christian life? The Apostle Paul had a *goal*. In Philippians 3:12-13a, Paul says,

"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my *goal*, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it."

What is the "all this" and the "goal" Paul is referring to? The answer comes from studying the context of the passage – we need to look at the Bible verses that come just before this verse.

Thus, to understand verse 12, we look back at what Paul was talking about in verses 10-11. There he says,

“I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.”

So we learn that the “all this” and “goal” in v12 refers to **knowing Christ**.

Paul was pursuing a real, deep, intimate knowledge of Jesus Christ that comes from having a personal *relationship* with Jesus. Paul pursued this in 3 areas: (1) Knowing the power of Christ’s resurrection, (2) Participating in Christ’s sufferings, and (3) Becoming like Jesus in his death.

Recap... The first step is to know the goal of our Christian life and that is: **to know Christ**.

// transition... now that we know the goal, the next question to ask is, “Are we there yet? Have we reached our goal?”

Amen. Alleluia.

Description: The spirit of excellence calls us to higher values and higher goals than does the world call us. We are to be people of higher standards in a world of mediocrity. Our Lord did not settle for second best. He was the greatest of all time and is always our example as we participate in the life of the Risen Christ.

Tags:

Education, faith, children, school, Christ, Jesus, God, parents, learning, life-long, excellence, goals, achieve, science, higher