

Sermon Matthew 16:13-20 Romans 12 August 24, 2008

## Living it Up – Into God’s Good Plan for You

It’s an old ballad – and I can only remember one line – and I didn’t take time to Google it to learn any more.... The one line I remember is enough to focus my response to Jesus’ words, as Marjorie read them, and to Paul’s words about life and about the Church, and about Jesus.

“I’d rather be a hammer than a nail, yes I would, I surely would, if I could. I’d rather be a hammer than a nail.”

And sometimes – we are the nail. Like it or not – sometimes we’re the nail – we’d rather not – no thank you, but sometimes we are. But we’d rather be the hammer. Any particular people, for example, in your life right now who you’d like to see be the nail to your hammer? Be careful now. ‘Cause when we’re choosing someone to be the nail, someone maybe be choosing us to be their nail.

But I like the line. It helps me focus on the message I heard in Jesus’ words and Paul’s. In those words I hear God’s call to us to live up into God’s good plans for us made known in Jesus Christ. God’s plan for us to be hammers in life, not nails.

For us to be, yes, a driving force for good – for God’s good ways of love in life, in all we do and say and are. God’s call for us to be hammers, to be people who hammer out justice and freedom and love.

Sometimes in life we can feel like we’re just the nails - and life is hammering us. This morning I think God’s word is calling us to see ourselves in a very different way – as God’s people empowered by God’s spirit, called to do God’s will – to live it up – a little and a lot – into God’s good plans for us...

Please pray with me...

God, sometimes, sometimes God, we wonder about you and your word and your plan for us in it all – sometimes we feel hammered by the bad things that happen in our lives and the lives of others. In this hour, Lord, give us ears to hear a good word –and may the words of my mouth, and the thoughts of these your faithful and loving people, be acceptable in your sight, and your good word to us in Christ this day. Amen.

He said it. He got it all right. He said – I know God is at work in everything for good – even in the most tragic situations. But for us God was at work for good in the near miracle healing of my wife’s near death health crisis. Thank you God for just being there. He got it right - God is there - Good, all the time.

The Apostle Paul used different words. “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Do not be conformed to this world – or – in other words – live it up, live it up into a new and higher level of existence. Not the world’s way, but God’s way. Overcome evil with Good.

Peter saw it in Jesus, in his teaching, in his living, in his unconditional love for people – all God’s people. And Peter said it – You are the Messiah. And in the face of all the mysteries of life, its unexplainable events and too often tragic experiences – even in the face of things he could not understand fully – Jesus’ suffering and death and resurrection - Still Peter chose to follow Christ...

To try to live it up in life into what he saw in Christ was God’s good plan for us. What is God’s good plan for us? What is God’s plan for you? Do you have any clue? Any idea of what it is you are supposed to be doing with the gift of life that you’ve been given?

Amid all the choices that life offers, all the ways we are encouraged to live – selfishly really.... To be self-centered. To satisfy ourselves with as many things as we can accumulate, with as many activities as we can get involved in... As much as we are pushed into the rat race life can be...

Even in the midst of all the clamor in your life, don’t you sense, don’t you feel the pull - the push - to get out of the rat race life can become - has it become a bit of that for you – or more - ? The pull to some how, some how, find a way to live that is more satisfying, fulfilling, soul pleasing, and even, more joyful?

Someone, deep into the ways of the world, once asked - in another song –I don’t remember too well – but the song asked the question... Is this all there is? Is this all there is? Is what we see around us, the confusing chaos of good and not good, of nature’s wonders and beauty, and nature’s terror in earth quake, wind, fire and flood. Delights, yes, but also disease and death.

And - In what we feel at work inside of us, sometimes very good feelings of kindness and care for others, but sometimes, anger and even hatred toward others who disturb us.

Is this confusing challenging chaotic world all there is for us? Or – Or – is there something more. Something for us to live up into – something better for us than we yet know? And the Apostle Paul's answer is yes, yes, yes.

“ Do not be conformed to this world – but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God , what is good and acceptable and perfect.

I suspect that those words from Paul would sum up well the theme – the central message – of the hugely popular book *The Shack*. While the author doesn't quite put it so bluntly, through out the book – which is the story of one man's struggle with life, with religion, with the Church, and ultimately with God after a tragic death in his family,

Through out the book Paul's words I think describe well the call the book's main character, McKenzie, hears and experiences in strange ways – God's call to him to live into God's good plan for him and for life.

The book is a good read – but – let me assure you –not as good or as deep or as compelling and satisfying finally – as what you can read in the Good Book. Quite honestly I hear the central message of the book *the Shack*,

I hear it more clearly, I hear it more powerfully, more helpfully – in almost any part of the Bible. Well – maybe not so easily in Leviticus. Have you read Leviticus lately? Probably not. Don't go there this afternoon – try chapter 8 of Romans instead.

But – the book - *the Shack* – gets at the issue - How shall we live in this world?

At one point – and I won't give much away here – McKenzie is asked to make a choice of leaving this world - or - living out his life in this world. McKenzie asks the question - So – is what I do in the world important? Does it matter? And the answer McKenzie gets is this –

“If anything matters, then everything matters. Because you are important, every thing you do is important. Every time you forgive, the universe changes. Every time you reach out and touch a heart or a life, the world changes. With every kindness and service, seen or unseen, God’s purposes are accomplished and nothing will ever be the same again.”

Do you believe that? Do you believe that is true for you and for the life you live? In the face of all the times you and I feel like nails in life – hammered by so many hammers - debt, and doubt, and disease and disaster and death....

Do you sense, do you, do you hear, through it all – that still small persistent voice of God calling you, calling you to listen and to hear - God’s call ...

Don’t be conformed to this world – be transformed by the renewing of your mind – Which by the way – Marjorie would say – and I would too – is a call to be in one of the studies offered this fall....

Be transformed - live it up – into God’s plans for you. Let love be genuine, hate what is evil. Hold fast to what is good, love one another with mutual affection - rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer, contribute to the needs of others, bless those who persecute you, If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with Good.

Yes – there’s the call. Live it up. Into God’s good plan for you. Find some new way – or ways – to be like Christ - to be a light of hope and promise in life.

Is it a call to Mississippi and Gulf Coast aid? Or - To spend a day in September helping a local Christian aid agency? Or yes – even to teach Sunday School and so to share the good news of God’s love with some of God ‘s most precious ones.

Or maybe just to try to focus in some new way each new day on the wonder of God’s gift to you of your life, and all its possibilities in this world – and – the next. But – whatever it is you sense God is calling you to do - what nails of Good news and compassion and care and love – God wants you to hammer into life ....

And you have sensed that call in some way in your life - In all the starry skies you’ve seen, the wonder of creation, and in all the tender moments in life you’ve experienced, even yes, in God’s word ....

That is God's call to you in Christ – to live it up - to live into the kind of life God intends for you. Filled with the purpose and promise of being a forever child of God. Yes... live it up.....

Amen.

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