



Why Were YOU Given the Gift of Life?

*Acts 1:6-14; I Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11 and John 17:1-11
A Sermon for Memorial Day, Sunday, May 28th, 2017
First Federated Church, Peoria, Illinois
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Why are you here? Out of all of the possibilities at the time of your conception, why were you given the gift of life? Was it by accident or design or a little of both? And, while we are pondering, “What is your Purpose in being here?” Have you ever wondered about questions like that? I intentionally used the word purpose instead of plan because I think that there is a real difference. A plan strikes me as a kind of blueprint that our lives follow, while a purpose reflects more of our meanderings to an ultimate place.

Having thought a lot about these questions, there are only three things that I know for certain. First, You are not an accident? Neither am I, for that matter. Second, You have a Purpose. And so do I. And third, the answer to Why cannot be answered if we begin with ourselves. We have to begin with God, the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth and All that there is.

When the Westminster Divines wrestled with the question of “Why” they wrote what became known as the Westminster Confession of Faith, as well as a longer and shorter catechism. In a recent Bible study I was asked “What is a catechism?” A catechism is a teaching tool that is formulated in a series of questions and answers. Many religious faiths use them. At one time, our Jesus following ancestors would have probably known one. They were largely taught in the home Parent-Child because that is where Christian Education took place!

The Westminster Catechism begins with this foundational question: “What is the chief end of Man (and, presumably, Woman)?” In other words, “Why are we here?” What is our Purpose? Answer?

“The chief end of Man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” (Once again, presumably Woman, too!)

Glorify is used some six times in today's gospel lesson. At a recent clergy study group one of the members raised the question, "What exactly does 'glorify'" mean?" I never thought of that before, so a little research revealed that "to glorify" is another way of saying "to honor". If It, Life, is really about God, then our Purpose or our Why? is that we were given the gift of life and placed on this planet earth at this time so that we may honor God with our lives.

Honoring God is not as easy as it may seem. It means that we are in relationship with God and with each other. A relationship with God means that we are close enough with God that we can throw all of our anxiety upon God because we know, in the words of our epistle lesson That God cares for us.

And because God cares for us we can face life's trials with a certain degree of confidence. It also means that we keep alert for the evil in this world for like a lion it can sneak up on us as we are distracted by the busyness of everyday living.

Our reading in Acts reminds us that we are the Risen Lord's witness in this world bearing testimony, telling others about how our lives have been changed by taking Jesus seriously. We are challenged to bear witness in our "Jeruselems" - among those with whom we share life, "Judeans" - those with whom we have much in common, "Samaritans" - those with whom we have little in common and may not even like as well as to the very ends of the earth.

Like those first disciples we are called to be united in Purpose and joined together in Prayer, all for the glory of God.

Amen.