

## Where We Go from Here

2 Corinthians 3: 17-4: 2

What does the future hold for me? Don't you wish sometimes that you could see what's going to happen? Don't you wish your wishes would come true the way you wish them? People spend literally millions of dollars every year on psychics, fortune tellers, and mystics who claim to reveal their future. One of the attractions of church for many is that it offers assurances about the future – assurances that God has a plan for them and that it is unfolding according to divine wisdom and timing. And our future is settled ultimately by the assurance of life after death and claims to know its exact nature.

I can see a great appeal in believing that the future is assured and insured. I believe God is eternal and therefore holds all our moments past, future, and present together all at once. When we say God knows our future, I'd agree with that. Yet the Bible and our faith tradition tell us we have free will -- freedom to shape our own future. We have the freedom and responsibility to make our own choices.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth, "Now the Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." (2 Corinthians 3: 17) This can mean many things to many people: freedom from being imprisoned by worry or fear, freedom to follow your dreams, and freedom to look at your life and choices honestly.

What does this mean for us? We are free to create our own future. As the church, we are free to create our future. As individuals, we 're free. It's completely up to us to become what and who we will be, who we want to be. Do you believe this? Are you skeptical? It takes a big step of faith to trust that you have the freedom to create your own future. Or maybe it just takes a little step at a critical time? Such trust in our power to create our own future may take just a small step of faith, but we will need to take it at a critical time: when we're afraid, worn down, or confused. It requires a choice to trust in your freedom.

The apostle went on to write, "And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another." (2 Corinthians 3: 18) So Paul suggested that a way to begin to trust your freedom is to look at each other, look in yourself, and there catch a glimpse of the reflection of God. Then trust that all of us are being transformed into the image of God: each in our own unique way.

Many scientists and philosophers suggest that the life force present in all matter is especially powerful in humans. One renowned theologian posited that this life force intersects each of us at the point of our own personality, at the core of our own soul. And in each of us God becomes personal -- in persons. (Tillich, "Letter to Einstein," *Theology of Culture*, ) And we can recognize God's presence in ourselves. In this divine partnership, we create our identity, our direction, and our future. In other words, we live by faith that we are within God and that God lives in us. When we pay attention to these reflections, and mirror the life of God in our lives and in our shared life, that perspective will guide our choices and give shape to our dreams. The key question is this: "what do you want to see your life becoming?"

Where I myself want to go from here cannot be measured in dollars or in recognition, but in joy and in a sense of integration. It consists of doing what I love to do – teaching and sharing life

with people who are on their journey with enthusiasm. That journey is challenging. It is not easy at all. Someone described it like going into  
a dark wood on a moonlight night. Trees and bushes crowd in on you. Wherever you step, you bump into another obstacle. Every noise and rustle is magnified. There is a whiff of danger. It seems safer to stand still than to move. Come the dawn, however, (the light of dawn that comes by patience, prayer, persistence, and a circle of trusted people) your path is clear. The [scary] noises are now the songs of birds; [and the] trees define the path instead of blocking it.  
(Charles Handy, *The Age of Paradox*, 14)

Being church means shaping our future by faith and freedom. What do you envision for this congregation? What do you want it to be? This sermon is the culmination of a series on what it is to be church. The goal of being Church is not to be more successful than other churches or even successful as our culture tends to measure success – in attendance and dollars. Now money is important because it lets us have a building in which to meet, a staff for leadership and friendship, and it lets me have a job! Attendance numbers are important because they reflect the people who are being touched with love and ministry, people who enrich and are enriched by the community of Crossroads Church. I agree with this writer:

Christianity was the proclamation of the end of religion, not of a new religion or even of the best of all religions. Religion can't do a thing about the world's problems. It never did work and it never will....  
(Robert Capon, *The Mystery of Christ*, 62)

So what does it mean to be church, the congregation, the blessed community, Crossroads Church? It means to embody holy wisdom -- "the world [as one] without human kingdoms, ethnic communities, national boundaries, or social identifications" (Fr. Richard Rohr, *The Naked Now*, 100) in stark contrast to the common sense wisdom of the world around us. It means to embody delight and trust that God delights in you. It means trusting that someone else delights in you. It means to delight in another person, in your work, and in your life. It means to live in the world according to God's economy. We long to claim our own abundance rather than borrow our self-worth.

To be church means to be a community of holy love, practicing human love without strings attached. It means to be a community embracing human love, in its many expressions, multiplied by the factor of God. It means to commit to walk our own life journey with great intention, to see the world differently, and to give ourselves for the good of all people. Our future is ours to shape and the invitation of faith is to shape it according to the values of compassion, courage, peace, justice, self-awareness, and love.

I am asking you now to take action. Be on your journey with great intention. One good way to start is to commit to attend at least one of the events at Crossroads during the Lenten season. There are two Sunday Seminar classes for adults: one on using the Enneagram for self-discovery and growth, and the other deals with the challenges and possibilities of "Navigating Life's Journey." Or you may choose to attend the Ash Wednesday service and maybe walk the Labyrinth that will be available in the Fellowship Hall on Ash Wednesday evening. Or you may choose to participate in the Lenten meditative study, *A Hidden Wholeness: Living an Undivided Life* over the next six Wednesday evenings. These events are designed for you, to help you shape your future and choose what, and who, you will be.

In addition, if you haven't already, please make an appointment with me to have a one-on-one talk about your life and my life, and the church's life. We can share insights, hopes, and maybe a few dreams. I look forward to talking with you. Let these actions be steps on our journey into

the woods, through the darkness, and out into the light of God's Spirit. As we come to see the reflection of the face of God in those around us, and in ourselves, may those who enter this community discover God here and in themselves. Amen.