

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 7:29-31

TOPIC: With expectations high for Christ's return, Paul encourages readers to detach from everything not God.

SUBJECT: Lives go in another direction when faith leads to concrete practices rather than what's true or false.

TITLE: Discovering Your Way

OK. I am going to confess something I usually reserve for Sundays when I confirm young people. In the history of the Scottsbluff United Methodist Church – where I grew up – I know of only two people who were ever kicked out of both Sunday school and confirmation.

I am one of those people.

I got kicked out for being unruly. I was unruly because I was bored in Sunday school and confirmation. I was bored because didn't feel any connection between what I was being taught and how it translated to the type of faith I needed.

What I needed were tools, so I wasn't limited to a head and heart faith, but rather a living, practical faith. As I was discovering my way, I needed to learn how to detach from how I felt about myself, so I could see how God sees me. Seeing myself differently, made it possible to see the world differently. Without that, something was always missing.

For all practical purposes, that's what the Apostle Paul is telling the church at Corinth this morning. When you discover your way, you see the world differently – and when you see faith differently – you live differently. That is a key so people detach from anything that is not God. Discovering your way should always follow the way of the resurrection.

PRAYER

Right out of the gate I'm going to say something today that might come as a surprise.

Some scholars argue that Paul and other first-century writings expected Jesus' return to happen before the start of the second century, but I'm not sure I agree with that; I think Paul and others were more forward thinking than the culture of the day, and I think Paul was that

way because his call in Acts represents how God invited Paul to discover the way his life needed to be. As 1 Corinthians suggests, Paul advocated for detachment because detaching ourselves from our preferences for God's preferences is part of the process of discovering your way. For centuries, I also think people have held onto an expectation that Jesus' return was going to happen in some grandiose manner. While that could happen, I question whether it is consistent with how God came into the world as a child born in a manger or a relatively anonymous man crucified and resurrected out of God's extreme love for the world.

I think God caters the approach to how each of us is made up. In my case, I know I have required a much more subtle and personal approach. I think that can be easily lost when folks think God is going to show up with bells and whistles and glitter. Through the years I've had people suggest times when they thought it was a good time for Jesus' return, to which I've often replied: "Jesus returns every day; are you ready to pay attention?"

I believe that's what Paul was getting at. Jesus returns daily; just pay attention. Jesus returns when people detach from whatever distracts them from God, so they might discover the way God has mapped out. Detaching from everything that isn't you makes you focus on qualities like faith, hope, love, healing, grace, and repentance rather than qualities driven by ego or pride such as obsessive thinking, sadness, contentment, possessions, and greed.

The way of detachment means learning to live with the tension between wanting everything to be how we might want it to be, and accepting how God is working through everything that is. Another way of describing this, I think, is to follow Yoda's advice to Anakin Skywalker, and "detach yourself from everything you fear to lose."

Discovering your way has to do with digging deep, to detach from everything that isn't you. Detach from everything that hides your God-authentic self. Discovering your way has you give up trying to control people and outcomes, so you can see how God is going to work through situations. Discovering your way invites you to let go of whatever you grieve in exchange for the way of health. Discovering your way essentially calls you to be more like the post-Pentecost community that sold everything and shared everything in common than the way of being possessed by possessions. Discovering your way has you participate in the world without using it, so you aren't preoccupied with it. Discovering your way invites you to heal, so you can walk with others as they heal.

Someone suggested that the focus of Paul's argument here has to do with the realization that when followers let Jesus transform their hearts, souls, minds, and lives, the way followers live their faith is represented in how they engage in social movements because that's where God makes the deepest transformations in people's lives. In essence, I have found detaching from how ego or pride makes possible a way for God to invite me into living as God created, called and has always intended I live.

A few years ago, when I was really wrestling with my life and my faith, I engaged in a process where I actively identified my values, beliefs, insights, and challenges because something I adhere to best is looking for consistencies in what I believe and how I live. It was like Jesus' invitation to the first disciples in today's gospel reading; it was God's way of saying "follow me". You discover your way when going with God is the single-most important thing you do for your life.

What's surprisingly affirming for me is that throughout this chapter Paul tells the Corinthians that everyone is capable of self-reflection and everyone can figure out what discovering their way looks like, so they are more grounded in God. For that reason, it's important to figure out what matters and what doesn't matter because it paves the way for identifying what you value, what you are committed to, and how you will commit to what God's will is.

For all practical purposes, discovering your way is a window of opportunity God gives us, where God graciously holds open a door or a window that heightens our sense of urgency to become as God made us and as God sees us. So, discovering your way is aligning with God's intentions.

For all practical purposes, the way of detachment is how God conforms us into Christ's image, as Paul suggests in Romans 8:29. The process has been a hard one for me, but it is one I live for daily. As God has gradually removed one preoccupation after another of mine, God has changed me and my life for the better. I think it goes without saying that God is always ready to do the same for anyone who's willing to go detach and discover their way.

In the name of the triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – one God in perfect community. Amen.