



Liturgical Day: The 23rd Sunday after Pentecost

Date: November 12, 2006

Sermon Title: Committing Our Hearts

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

George Barna is one of the leading surveyors of modern religious life. His data on congregations and individual Christians has been invaluable to those who are trying to understand how Christians live out their faithfulness today. In a recent poll, he asked Americans what they believe their life purpose is. The responses indicate Americans may have their priorities turned around.

**George Barna
Survey**

The survey of 1003 adults found that 44 percent believe their top priority in life is to have a satisfying family life. Women are more likely than men to rank family as their top priority. Even so, men rank family as most important by a three-to-one margin over other choices. Families with children under 18 in the home and those with higher incomes also rank family life higher.

The second most common priority named by 18 percent of adults, is understanding and carrying out the principles of their faith. In this regard, women are more likely than men to list this as a primary concern of their life. Adults aged 40 to 70 are much more likely than younger adults to prioritize faith.

Having good friends is named by at least one out of every ten adults as a priority, while other common priorities included earning a comfortable living, having significant influence, achieving success, and enjoying leisure.

According to Barna, the data highlights some important concerns for religious leaders because it raises questions about the faith commitment of many adults. In his analysis, Barna said, "One must wonder if the struggles evident in so many marriages and parent-child relationships are connected to the fact that people are generally more interested in pursuing a fulfilling family life than understanding the principles for meaningful living that may help shape such a family experience."¹

George Barna's interpretation of this survey is based on an ancient Christian belief: that, as humans, we are created to be in relationship with God. What's more: that relationship is designed to play the central role in our lives. A corollary belief is this: only when our faith is the central priority in our lives, will the other areas of our life be experienced to their fullest. In other words: if you want to have a rich and fulfilling family life, live as if your relationship with God is even more important than your family. If you want to have good friends, live as if your relationship with God is even more important than your best friend. If you want to earn a comfortable living, live as if your relationship with God is even more important than your salary. If you want to achieve success, live as if your relationship with God is even more important than the successes in your dreams. When our relationship with God is strong and growing, it becomes an added to strength to all the other important areas of our lives.

That's what the Habits of Discipleship emphasis is all about here at Saint Peter: it is an attempt to re-order our lives, so that our commitment to God – our commitment to follow Christ with our lives – is our central priority. This morning we are finishing up a seven-week long focus on these five habits of discipleship. Some have suggested that maybe seven weeks is a bit too long to stay focused on one topic like this. But it lies so close to the heart of our mission as a congregation, that we have chosen to do it every Fall, now, for the past three years. And as Barna points out, there is an added

**Discipleship
& Priorities**

FIRST LESSON
1ST KINGS 17:8-16
GOSPEL LESSON
ST. JOHN 11:1-16
PRAYER OF THE DAY
**LORD, WHEN THE DAY
OF WRATH COMES WE
HAVE NO HOPE
EXCEPT IN YOUR
GRACE. MAKE US SO
TO WATCH FOR THE
LAST DAYS THAT THE
CONSUMMATION OF
OUR HOPE MAY BE THE
JOY OF THE MARRIAGE
FEAST OF YOUR SON,
JESUS CHRIST OUR
LORD. AMEN.**

9300 E. BELLEVUE AVE.
GREENWOOD VILLAGE,
COLORADO 80111
VOICE
(303) 770-9300
FAX
(303) 770-9301
WEB
WWW.STPLC.ORG



Living in God's amazing grace

benefit: when Christian discipleship holds the central role in our living that it is intended to hold, all the other hopes and dreams that we have for life come out so much better.

But that is not why we embrace discipleship, of course. We don't work on these habits of discipleship because we want to have other areas of our life be stronger, even though that often happens. No, we do so because that's what it means to be a Christian. To have Christ at the center of our lives means to be the kind of people who:

- Pray and read their Bibles every day.
- Worship every Sunday morning with God's people.
- Find an opportunity, every month, to make a difference in the community.
- Give generously to support ministry in the local congregation.
- Gather with others on a regular basis, to experience Christian community, and support one another as we seek to grow in faith.

To be a Christian means to understand that each of these five areas of focus are essential elements in our relationship with God.

We have been so richly blessed by God. In the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are given the gift of forgiveness and the hope of eternal life. As we in the Lutheran tradition like to say: "There is nothing we need to do – there is nothing we can do – to be saved. God has done that for us as a gift." But as one of my seminary professors liked to say: "Now that you know you don't have to do anything, what are you going to do?"

**Grace and
Response**

His question is our question this morning. At the close of this worship service, each of you will be invited forward to bring your commitments to grow in discipleship up to the altar and dedicate them to God. We will do so after gathering together for the meal that assures us of God's love. Then:

- Forgiven, renewed, strengthened by Christ, we will ask of one another: "What are you going to do?"
- Realizing how important it is to be in daily communication with God, we will ask of one another: "What are you going to do?"
- Knowing that we are called to take Sabbath time every week, and gather with God's people for worship no matter where we are, we will ask of one another: "What are you going to do?"
- Remembering that Christ commands us to care for the needs of those who surround us in the community, we will ask of one another: "What are you going to do?"
- Believing that financial generosity is as vital to our own personal well-being as it is to our relationship with God, we will ask of one another: "What are you going to do?"
- Aware of how important it is to gather regularly with others who share our faith, we will ask of one another: "What are you going to do?"

What are you going to do? No, not to save yourself, of course. That has already been accomplished by Christ on the cross at Calvary. What are you going to do to thank God for the many ways you have been blessed? What are you going to do to offer a witness to the world of your faith? What are you going to do to ensure that you continue growing as a disciple of Jesus Christ? What are you going to do to see that the ministries of this congregation are as strong as they can possibly be? It is up to each of us to decide this morning. What are you going to do? What are we going to do? How will our response reflect the gratitude we have to God, who has done so much for us? What are you going to do?

You should each have before you a commitment card. It is the same one that was mailed to you this past week if you are a member of Saint Peter. I'd like to give you a couple of minutes right now to think about how grateful you are to God. Then, make some plans. Make plans to thank God by growing in discipleship. Share those plans with us, if you will. Let us know where you hope to be growing in the coming year. And we'll keep you in our prayers, as you seek to live in a way that is faithful to the God who has blessed you so richly. Let's each take a few minutes and fill out our discipleship commitment cards.

**Committing
Our Hearts**

[Provide time for the assembly to complete their forms.]

Thank you for doing that. We'll invite you to bring those commitments forward at the end of the service. Graced by God, saved by Christ, comforted by the presence of the Holy Spirit, there is nothing we need to do – there is nothing we can do – to earn God's love and affection.

Let me leave with you with this one question:

QUESTION OF THE DAY:

Now that you know you don't have to do anything. What will you do?

I look forward to being blessed by your answers – and your commitments – in the coming year. Amen.

David J. Risendal, Pastor (November 12, 2006)

English Text: ⁱⁱ

^{11.1} Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. ³ So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." ⁴ But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." ⁵ Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, ⁶ after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

⁷ Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." ⁸ The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" ⁹ Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. ¹⁰ But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." ¹¹ After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." ¹² The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." ¹³ Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. ¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵ For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." ¹⁶ Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." ⁱⁱⁱ

Greek Text:

¹¹ Ἦν δέ τις ἀσθενῶν, Λάζαρος ἀπὸ Βηθανίας, ἐκ τῆς κώμης Μαρίας καὶ Μάρθας τῆς ἀδελφῆς αὐτῆς. ² Ἦν δὲ Μαριάμ ἡ ἀλείψασα τὸν κύριον μύρω καὶ ἐκμάξασα τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ ταῖς θριξίν αὐτῆς, ἧς ὁ ἀδελφὸς Λάζαρος ἠσθένει. ³ ἀπέστειλαν οὖν αἱ ἀδελφαὶ πρὸς αὐτὸν λέγουσαι· κύριε, ἴδε ὃν φιλεῖς ἀσθενεῖ. ⁴ ἀκούσας δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν· αὕτη ἡ ἀσθένεια οὐκ ἔστιν πρὸς θάνατον ἀλλὰ ὑπὲρ τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ, ἵνα δοξασθῇ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ δια αὐτῆς. ⁵ ἦγάπα δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς τὴν Μάρθαν καὶ τὴν ἀδελφὴν αὐτῆς καὶ τὸν Λάζαρον. ⁶ ὡς οὖν ἤκουσεν ὅτι ἀσθενεῖ, τότε μὲν ἔμεινεν ἐν ᾧ ἦν τόπω δύο ἡμέρας, ⁷ ἔπειτα μετὰ τοῦτο λέγει τοῖς μαθηταῖς· ἄγωμεν εἰς τὴν Ἰουδαίαν πάλιν. ⁸ λέγουσιν αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταὶ· ῥαββί, νῦν ἐζήτουν σε λιθάσαι οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, καὶ πάλιν ὑπάγεις ἐκεῖ; ⁹ ἀπεκρίθη Ἰησοῦς· οὐχὶ δώδεκα ὥραι εἰσιν τῆς ἡμέρας; ἐάν τις περιπατῆ ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ, οὐ προσκόπτει, ὅτι τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου τούτου βλέπει. ¹⁰ ἐὰν δὲ τις περιπατῆ ἐν τῇ νυκτί, προσκόπτει, ὅτι τὸ φῶς οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν αὐτῷ. ¹¹ Ταῦτα εἶπεν, καὶ μετὰ τοῦτο λέγει αὐτοῖς· Λάζαρος ὁ φίλος ἡμῶν κεκοίμηται· ἀλλὰ πορεύομαι ἵνα ἐξυπνίσω αὐτόν. ¹² εἶπαν οὖν οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτῷ· κύριε, εἰ κεκοίμηται σωθήσεται. ¹³ εἰρήκει δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς περὶ τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ, ἐκεῖνοι δὲ ἔδοξαν ὅτι περὶ τῆς κοιμήσεως τοῦ ὕπνου λέγει. ¹⁴ τότε οὖν εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς παρηγοῖα· Λάζαρος ἀπέθανεν, ¹⁵ καὶ χαίρω δια ὑμᾶς ἵνα πιστεύσητε, ὅτι οὐκ ἤμην ἐκεῖ· ἀλλὰ ἄγωμεν πρὸς αὐτόν. ¹⁶ εἶπεν οὖν Θωμᾶς ὁ λεγόμενος Δίδυμος τοῖς συμμαθηταῖς· ἄγωμεν καὶ ἡμεῖς ἵνα ἀποθάνωμεν μετὰ αὐτοῦ."

ⁱ From a sermon entitled, *What is A Purpose-Driven Life to Americans?* (Jim Sandell; May 17, 2005), quoting <http://barna.org>.

ⁱⁱ A list of Bible lessons for the coming weeks is available at www.elca.org/dcm/worship/church_year/lectionary.html.

ⁱⁱⁱ St. John 11:1-16, New Revised Standard Version Bible (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

^{iv} St. John 11:1-16, The Greek New Testament, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart). To display the Greek text correctly, choose Palatino Linotype font.