

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

What is your plans?

- What kind of plans do you have?

That question can have a short term or a longer term focus?

- For example, what plans do you have after church today?
- Do you want to go out for breakfast?

Or, the focus can be longer term.

- What plans do you have for the next 5 years of your life?
- Or even, what is your end of life plans?.....and even, what is your plans and ideas after taken from this earth?

Today, my focus is more on your intermediate to long term plans rather than your short term plans.

- And those intermediate to long term plans change and perhaps even become more realistic as you get older.

Ask a young person with their whole life ahead of them.....

- What is your life plans?
- And you might get some unrealistic worldly ideas.

For example.....

- I am going to be president of the United States.
- I am going to be a superstar hall of fame athlete.
- I am going to be a billionaire. A world famous billionaire.
- Now these things might happen for a few folks, but even for them it will take a lot for any of them to come to be.
- And, where is God in all of those ideas?

Ask the question when you reach middle age and perhaps it changes and you hear things like.....

- I want to work 15 more years and then be able to enjoy a long, healthy, happy retirement.
- Perhaps more realistic, but again I ask where is God in those ideas?

Or, as we get into our later years of life it can change again.....

- I just want to be healthy. To do the things I want to do.
- I just want to be able to live out my life at home.
- I just want to live independently.
- And once more I ask, where is God in those ideas?

But as we all know, any of our plans can all change in a heartbeat.

- Literally a heartbeat.
- Health issues come up and now there are even the challenges of independent living.
- I planned to have a long, healthy retirement with my friends and/or spouse and now they have been taken from me.

A week ago, we had the tragic, senseless, shooting of 10 people in Buffalo, New York.

- Do you suppose any of those 10 people had any thoughts or ideas of being innocently gunned down in a store last weekend?
- And I doubt if any of their loved ones had in their plans for them to lose their loved ones that quickly or tragically.

Many times our life plans change.....or even are not that well thought out as to what we really want to do or can have. The story goes something like this.....

- There was a man who decided he was going to commit suicide.
- He wanted to plan it out perfectly so he planned for it to be done 3 ways.

He would go up to the center point of a very high bridge.

- He would lite himself on fire.
- After that he would shoot himself.
- And then he would have a rope anchored to the bridge and tied around his neck and jump off the bridge and hang himself.

He got to the center of the bridge to carry out his tragic plan.

- He tied the rope around his neck.
- He lit himself on fire.
- Pulled out the gun, shot himself and jumped off the bridge.

But when he carried out the act.....

- The bullet from the gun strayed high and severed the rope from which he was to dangle.

As a result.....

- He fell into the water which put out the fire.
- And, of course, the bullet and the rope did no damage to him.

He then frantically swam to shore.

- When he got there he sighed and said.....
- Wow, that was close. I'm glad I knew how to swim.
- I didn't plan on having to swim back to shore.

So for us Christians, what is the answer to all this planning?

- How do we even deal with all this?
- What should our focus be?

Today, the apostle Paul helps us out.

- Both from his instructions to us in his epistle writings and from our first reading for today and how he dealt with plans and changes.

Paul had a lot to say about.....

- Plans for our lives.
- Dealing with plans that change and tragedies.....
- And what should be the focus, the foundation, the centerpiece, and anchor for our lives.

He first asks and answers the question of what should be the purpose for our lives.

- What motivates us?
- The love of Christ.

What is our purpose? Two fold.

- First, for others to also know and have the love of Christ.
- And secondly, to bring glory to God.

In all we say and do and all we are about.....that is to be our purpose.

- And that then forms and frames in all the plans for our life.

- For the young person just beginning.
- For the person in their middle ages.
- And even for the elderly confined to an assisted living facility.

And yes, we will face tragedies, hardships, and disappointments.

- Paul tells us that.....
- All our troubles here on earth are light and momentary.
- No matter what they are....they are light and momentary compared to the eternal glory that awaits us.

Paul then compares us to clay jars.

- Clay jars are fragile.
- Clay jars can do nothing on their own.
- Clay jars follow the form and function of the potter, their master.
- We follow the form and function of Jesus.
- And the weaker we are.....the more Christ is conveyed.

And we focus not on things seen.....but on things unseen.

- And in so doing, day by day the inner self is renewed.

Paul also says that life here on earth is like tenting.

- We are living in earthly temporary tents.
- Heaven is our eternal home that we so much can look forward to.
- Our heavenly home not made by human hands.

Paul says, no matter what, we will always have a roof over our heads.

- This reminds us of John chapter 14 verse 2.
- In My Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?

Paul says.....

- We are hard pressed.....but not crushed.
- Perplexed.....but not despaired.
- Persecuted.....but not abandoned.
- And struck down.....but not destroyed.

- The love of Christ motivates us, anchors us, and allows us to persevere through whatever we face on this earthly journey.....all with our eyes on the heavenly prize.

But that is all easier said than done.

- What about Paul?
- Our first reading for today gives us an idea of Paul's application of this.
- Perhaps you've heard the term, "walk the talk."

Okay, Paul, walk the talk!

- Paul's second missionary journey.
- He wants and plans to go back and visit those brothers and towns where churches were established in his first missionary journey.
- What a joy that could be.
- See how they are doing.
- Have a reunion with them and give encouragement.

He starts out.....

- Things are going reasonably well.
- Here is where he met Timothy and took him with him.
- Timothy would be a great assistant and successor to Paul.

But then things don't go as planned.

- Verses 7 and 8 from Acts chapter 16, just ahead of where our reading starts today.
- When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas.

And this now is where our first reading for today picks up.

- A vision appeared to Paul in the night; a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."
- Macedonia? I don't know anything about Macedonia.
- That wasn't in my plans!

What was Paul to do?

- Walk the talk Paul.
- Verse 10. And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

- And they went straight to the region of Macedonia and landed in Philippi.

They know no one.

- There were no synagogues there.

And we are told on the Sabbath they went outside the city gates where they expected to find a place of prayer.

- And they sat down and met some women including Lydia.
- And the Lord opened the hearts of these women.
- And they were baptized.
- And Lydia invited them to stay at her house.

And here is where the church of Philippi and Paul's letter to them, the Book of Philippians comes from.

- Often called Paul's book of joy.
- Which by the way he later wrote while imprisoned in Rome.

Did it all go well there?

- NO.
- Here also is one of the times when Paul was imprisoned for awhile.

But here was the introduction of Christ and the first Christians in Europe.

- If you were able to trace back your Christianity to its very beginning.....
- Most of us come from European heritage and here is where it began.

Paul's love and passion for the Lord.

- Paul's following God's plan and proclaiming the love of Christ to those in Macedonia, that is Europe.

So what does this mean for us?

- Is life easy? NO.
- Is there many turns, disappointments, and change in plans? YES.
- But we remain compelled by the love of Christ with the purpose of sharing Christ with others and bringing glory to God.
- And keeping that focus with our eyes fixed on our eternal home with Him.....we endure.

And for those loved ones who have gone before us in the faith?

- We rejoice.
- We know that they now have what we yearn for.
- If we cherish this time here on earth.....we have so much more to look forward to.

That is the wide lens focus.

- Let me for just a moment, before I bring this message to a close, also focus this down a little bit to the intermediate to an application for us.
- This Tuesday we once again have our Voters' Assembly and election of officers.

Once more, we fall far short in filling positions.

- Some of our positions and boards not even officially functioning.

We talked about this at our last Board of Elders meeting.

- And we determined to focus in at this time in 3 areas.

Those members that have wandered from the flock.

- They are still members but not with us.
- We will look to recruit and further fill our Board of Elder's positions to be able to call on more members and share the love of Christ with them.

The second area—outreach to the community beyond our current membership.

- For this, we will look to revitalize our Board of Evangelism Committee that was shut down with COVID.

And thirdly, to rejuvenate youth. Get our Sunday School going again and more adults in God's Word, Bible study.

- For this we will look to formally reestablish our Board of Education.
- These groups each to brainstorm and focus on ideas and ways to rejuvenate some of our ministries here at Hope.
- At the same time follow the lead and the plans of the Holy Spirit.

Will the recruitment be easy and comfortable? NO.

- In fact, for our Board of Elders and myself.....we may be hesitant and unsure as we go forward.
- We may feel awkward in some of our recruitment efforts.

But if/as you are recruited.....I ask you to receive us well.

- To give serious, prayerful consideration to the invitation made and God's purpose and plans for you.

Remember, for all of us, we are clay jars.

- Fragile and unable to do anything on our own.
- The Holy Spirit will encourage and lead all of us to carry out the ministries He desires.

Last week, while on vacation, I saw a saying that fits well with this message today.

- It goes like this.....
- We might not have it all together but together we have it all.

No matter where you are in life.....

- As you make your plans and for those moments when you get tired or discouraged.....
- Return to Calvary and view again the love that Christ demonstrated.
- Remember our purposes. To know and have the love of Christ and bring glory to God.
- And remain focused on what lies ahead and again rise to newness of life.
- Amen.

(Please stand) And now, may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Having heard the Word of God, we now prepare our hearts and minds to say together the words of the Nicene Creed as found on page 158 in your hymnal.