

Everyone Is Looking For You!

1 Corinthians 9:16-23 & Mark 1:29-39

Saint Paul's Memorial United Methodist Church

1001 W Colfax Ave, South Bend, Indiana 46616

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Pastor Tom Thews

1 Corinthians 9:16-23 (NLT)

¹⁶ Yet preaching the Good News is not something I can boast about. I am compelled by God to do it. How terrible for me if I didn't preach the Good News! ¹⁷ If I were doing this on my own initiative, I would deserve payment. But I have no choice, for God has given me this sacred trust. ¹⁸ What then is my pay? It is the opportunity to preach the Good News without charging anyone. That's why I never demand my rights when I preach the Good News.

¹⁹ Even though I am a free man with no master, I have become a slave to all people to bring many to Christ. ²⁰ When I was with the Jews, I lived like a Jew to bring the Jews to Christ. When I was with those who follow the Jewish law, I too lived under that law. Even though I am not subject to the law, I did this so I could bring to Christ those who are under the law. ²¹ When I am with the Gentiles who do not follow the Jewish law, I too live apart from that law so I can bring them to Christ. But I do not ignore the law of God; I obey the law of Christ. ²² When I am with those who are weak, I share their weakness, for I want to bring the weak to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some. ²³ I do everything to spread the Good News and share in its blessings.

Mark 1:29-39 (NLT)

²⁹ After Jesus left the synagogue with James and John, they went to Simon and Andrew's home. ³⁰ Now Simon's mother-in-law was sick in bed with a high fever. They told Jesus about her right away. ³¹ So he went to her bedside, took her by the hand, and helped her sit up. Then the fever left her, and she prepared a meal for them.

³² That evening after sunset, many sick and demon-possessed people were brought to Jesus. ³³ The whole town gathered at the door to watch. ³⁴ So Jesus healed many people who were sick with various diseases, and he cast out many demons. But because the demons knew who he was, he did not allow them to speak.

³⁵ Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray. ³⁶ Later Simon and the others went out to find him. ³⁷ When they found him, they said, "Everyone is looking for you." ³⁸ But Jesus replied, "We must go on to other towns as well, and I will preach to them, too. That is why I came." ³⁹ So he traveled throughout the region of Galilee, preaching in the synagogues and casting out demons.

Everyone Is Looking For You!

Welcome to this very special liturgical holy day known as Super Bowl Sunday. No use fighting it. I know that some of you are focused almost completely on football today.

I heard about one young guy who is really in a difficult situation. He bought two tickets for today's Super Bowl far in advance. He forgot that he and his fiancé had scheduled their wedding for this same day and time. Now he realizes he can't go. It's out of the question. So, if you're interested and want to go in his place, here's the relevant information: it's at St. Peter's Church in New York City at 5 p.m. Her name's Louise. She'll be the one wearing a white dress.

Of course, even pastors can get caught up in Super Bowl fever. I heard about one Presbyterian Church where as the time for the collection of the tithes and offerings was approaching, the minister, a true sports enthusiast, reached into his pocket, took out a quarter, flipped it into the air, glanced at it as it landed, then in typical referee fashion joyfully announced: "The ushers will receive!"

I don't know if the church received a larger offering after his attempt at sports levity or not. I guess it's worth a try. Maybe later this morning. But enough about football.

In today's story, Jesus heals Simon Peter's mother-in-law of a fever. Do you ever think of Simon Peter as being married? From the scriptures we know that he was. If you ever get the chance to go to Capernaum they will show you an excavation of what they believe to be Simon Peter's home. It is located next to a synagogue where Jesus used to teach. I wonder how Peter's wife felt about his giving up his occupation, leaving everything, and following Jesus? Maybe she was an understanding woman. I wonder, though, if it was ever a source of conflict?

Sometimes we may think we don't have time to serve Christ. Too many family responsibilities. Christ has heard that excuse before.

Anyway, Simon Peter had a mother-in-law, and that evening after sunset, (the Sabbath having ended at sunset), after Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law, Mark tells us the people of the area brought to Jesus all their sick and demon-possessed. In fact, the whole town was gathered at His door.

Think of that, "The whole town was gathered at the door..." I guess this was the first century equivalent of a flash mob. They didn't communicate by Facebook or Twitter or Snapchat. They had to do it the old-fashioned way, person to person. But it worked. The whole town gathered at His door. Everyone wanted to see Jesus.

The next morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place where He prayed. That's important, isn't it? No matter how pressing Jesus' calendar, no matter how many people needed Him, Jesus took time to pray. Sounds like He was setting an example for us. Simon and his companions went to look for Jesus, and when they found Him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"

To me that makes sense. I don't know how to say this without it sounding like a platitude or a cliché, but I really do believe that deep down all people everywhere are looking for Christ. They may not know His name, they might use religious symbols and terminology that are different from what you and I would use, but they are looking for Christ all the same.

FOR ONE THING, EVERYBODY NEEDS MEANING IN THEIR LIVES.

Everybody needs something to believe in, something to guide them. Otherwise they will wake up one day and realize that nothing in life makes sense. Could it be, they think to themselves, that, like the animals, we are simply born, live out our time on earth, and then die? There is no meaning to love, no meaning to sorrow, no meaning to life itself?

Of course, that is the philosophy of many people today. It's like a man I heard about recently who filled his car with gas at a self-service gas station. After he had paid and driven away, he realized that he had left the gas cap on top of his car. He stopped and looked and, sure enough, it was gone.

He thought for a second and realized that other people must have done the same thing, and that it was worth going back to look by the side of the road since, even if he couldn't find his own gas cap, he might be able to find another one that fit.

Sure enough, after only a short time of searching, he found a gas cap. He carefully wiped it off and slipped it into place with a satisfying click.

He told his wife as he climbed back into the car, "I may have lost my gas cap, but I found another one that fits and it's even a better cap than the one I had." Then he added, "THIS ONE LOCKS!"

That's great — until the next time he needs gas. What good is a locking gas cap with no key? The point is this: like the man with the locked gas tank, to many people the secret to life is locked up and, without Christ, there is no key. To them, nothing makes sense. Life is simply one thing after another and then you die!

Renowned preacher, theology professor and storyteller Fred Craddock tells a neat story that caught my attention. He said he was visiting in the home of one of his former students after graduation, and after a great dinner, the young parents excused themselves and hustled the kids off to bed, leaving Fred in the living room with the family pet — a large, sleek greyhound. Earlier in the evening Fred had watched the kids roll on the floor playing with the dog.

"That's a full-blooded greyhound there," the father of the kids had told Fred. "He once raced professionally in Florida. Then we got him. Great dog with the kids, that greyhound."

So there was Fred sitting there alone with this large dog. The dog turned to Fred and asked, "This your first visit to Connecticut?" "No," Fred answered. "I went to school up here a long time ago." "Well, I guess you heard. I came up here from Miami," said the greyhound.

"Oh, yeah, you retired?" Fred asked. "No," said the greyhound, "is that what they told you? No, no, I didn't retire. I tell you, I spent 10 years as a professional racing greyhound. That means 10 years of

running around that track day after day, seven days a week with others chasing that rabbit. Well, one day, I got up close; I got a good look at that rabbit. You know what? It was a fake! I had spent my whole life chasing a fake rabbit! Hey, I didn't retire; I quit!"

Well, no wonder that dog quit, and was eager to tell Fred why. I hope no one in this room can relate to that greyhound. But there are many people who can relate. They're spending their lives chasing fake rabbits. In their minds there is no purpose to life at all, no key to it all, no meaning.

Some of you may remember a very famous French existentialist novelist named Albert Camus. He was one of the twentieth century's most famous skeptics. There is evidence that, toward the end of his life, he discovered a vacuum in his life, a vacuum that nothing could fill. Consequently he began attending the American Church in Paris. He even discussed the possibility of baptism with the pastor.

"The reason I have been coming to church," he told the pastor, "is because I am seeking. I'm almost on a pilgrimage — seeking something to fill the void that I am experiencing — no one else knows. Certainly the public and the readers of my novels, while they feel that void, are not finding the answers in what they are reading. But deep down you are right," Camus said. "I am searching for something that the world is not giving me."

What neither Camus nor his readers understood is that nothing in this world CAN satisfy their search for meaning. There is only one person who can do that. His name is Jesus Christ. In order to have a satisfying life we must have meaning in our life. His disciples came to Jesus and said, "Everyone is looking for you!"

I believe that is true whether we recognize it or not. Everyone is seeking for Christ. He is the truth, the way, the life. This is revealed in the narrative that follows. After His disciples told Christ that everyone was looking for Him, the Master replied, "Let us go somewhere else — to the nearby villages — so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." Why did Christ come into our world?

HE CAME TO SHARE HIS MESSAGE OF GOD'S LOVE AND FORGIVENESS OF SIN WITH THE WORLD.

He came to give us the key to a very big secret. It is the good news that life does have meaning. We are not alone in this world with no key to its meaning.

Michio Kaku, an outstanding physicist and thinker about our future, in his book *Physics of the Future* tells about when he was eight years old. He remembers all the teachers at his school buzzing with the latest news that a great scientist had just died.

That night, the newspapers printed a picture of this deceased scientist's office. On his desk was an unfinished manuscript. The caption read that the greatest scientist of our era could not finish his greatest masterpiece.

“What,” thought young Kaku, “could be so difficult that such a great scientist could not finish it? What could possibly be that complicated and that important?”

To Kaku, this became more fascinating than any murder mystery, more intriguing than any adventure story. He had to know what was in that unfinished manuscript.

Later, of course, he found out that the name of this scientist was Albert Einstein and the unfinished manuscript was to be his crowning achievement. This was to be Einstein’s attempt to create a “theory of everything,” an equation that would unlock the secrets of the universe and perhaps allow him to “read the mind of God.” But he never finished his search. He was never able to read the mind of God.

But I will say this for Einstein. His search may have been a bit presumptuous, but, on the other hand, he never dismissed the possibility of the existence of God.

Dr. Daniel Lioy tells about a bronze statue of Professor Einstein at the west end of Constitution Avenue in Washington, D.C. The statue is 21 feet tall. Einstein’s figure is seated, wearing a baggy sweater, wrinkled corduroy trousers, and sandals. His shock of hair is in familiar disarray.

“At Einstein’s feet is a map of the universe — a 28-foot square slab of granite in which 2,700 small metal studs are embedded. Each stud represents the location in the sky of a planet, major star, or familiar celestial body at noon on April 22, 1979 — the time the memorial was dedicated.

“The expression on the face of Einstein’s statue is a mixture of wisdom, peace, and wonder. The face reflects the serenity of a man who believed a divine mind had conceived the universe he spent his life trying to understand. He would tell his colleagues who believed in a random universe, ‘God does not play dice with the universe.’”

Albert Einstein, perhaps the smartest man who ever lived, died without ever being able to read the mind of God. But I tell you that any of our young people or any of our old folks, for that matter, can find the key to the meaning of everything.

IT’S JESUS CHRIST. IT’S JESUS CHRIST AND HIS LOVE FOR ALL OF US.

He is the light that shines in the darkness. He is the hope that never fails. Jesus is the life that never ends. He is the key to the secret of life. When we join our life with His, we find everything we need for a complete life.

What Christ gives us is not an easy-to-follow three-step plan to a more satisfying life. What Jesus gives us is much better. He gives us Himself.

I understand there is a sign as you walk down the stairs toward the baggage claim area of the Memphis, Tennessee Airport. Memphis, of course, was the place singer Elvis Presley called home. On

the sign in the Memphis airport is the motto of Graceland, the former home of the king of rock and roll. The sign reads: "Discover Your Inner Elvis."

I don't know if we have any Elvis fans in this congregation or not. But far more important than discovering our inner Elvis is the opportunity you and I have to discover our inner Jesus. He is our only hope for making sense out of life and giving us a sense of meaning and purpose. And the formula Jesus gave us for a successful life is so simple: have faith in Jesus Himself, then love God and love your neighbor.

Robert Wuthnow tells the story of Jack Casey, a rescue squad worker. Casey had a difficult childhood. He once said, "All I ever learned from my father is I didn't want to be like him." Casey was raised in a tough home, the son of an alcoholic father. But something happened to Jack when he was a child that changed his life.

There came a time when Jack needed to have surgery and he was terrified. He remembered the nurse who remained by his side, holding his hand, reassuring him that everything will be okay. "I'll be right here, no matter what," she told him. And she kept her word; she was there and greeted him with a smile the moment he opened his eyes.

Years later, Jack became a paramedic and was called to the scene of an accident. A man was pinned upside down in his pickup. Jack did his best to free him even as gasoline dripped down on them. The man was afraid that he was going to die as the rescuers worked to free him. All it would take would be one spark to send the whole scene up in flames.

Jack remembered back to that time when he was a child and the nurse who never left him. He took the man's hands and squeezed them as he said, "Don't worry! I'm right here with you! I'm not going anywhere!"

Days later, the rescued truck driver said to Jack, "You know, you were an idiot, the thing could have exploded and we'd both have been burned up!" "I just couldn't leave you," Jack said.

That's why there is meaning to life. There is One who will never leave us no matter what our situation. And He calls on us to share Jesus Himself and to share that same kind of love and compassion that He has for us with everyone we meet.

Don't go through life believing that the secret to life is locked up somewhere with no key available for the likes of you and me. There is a key. His name is Jesus Christ. And to unlock the meaning of life all you have to do is have faith in Jesus and give Him the Lordship of your life. Let Him be in charge. If you choose to do that today, God bless you. But do please come and talk to me after the service so I can help you with your walk of faith.

