

“Pressing on towards the goal”

October 2, 2011

Text: Philippians 3:4b-14

Well, it's Confirmation Sunday in our church and my challenge this morning, therefore, is to say something to our confirmands that touches their lives. This is their day, the day they are *confirming* the decision made for them by their parents when they were baptized as infants.

I.

Our Lectionary reading from Philippians for today is an excellent scripture for Confirmation Sunday. More than anything, what the Apostle Paul wants in life is to *know* and to *be* like Christ. This is his goal, the purpose of his life: to *be* like Christ.

My guess is that you'd expect the Bible (one of Paul's letters) to say something like that. And you'd expect the minister to say something like that as well—that our goal as Christians is to *know* and to *be* like Christ.

So, how to make this real for us? If we think about it, it's an overwhelming mandate. We're supposed to BE like the one who was so full of God that compassion just flowed through his veins. Imagine if we were all more like that ... bursting with compassion ...

1. Like when he saw the 5,000 that day ... he'd been tired and weary. It had been a long day and he had gone off to pray and be by himself. But the multitudes knew about him and were able to follow him. And he sees them and—immediately—he has compassion on them. And he cured the sick and brought healing to the lame. And as the day was wearing on and they were all hungry—with only two fish and five loaves, they all ate.
2. And the time when Jesus saw a widow at Nain whose only son has died and is being carried out of town. Seeing her, he's filled with compassion for the despaired woman: *do not weep*, he says to the widow ... and then, to her dead son, *Young man, I say to you, rise!* And man gets up and resumes his life.

These are stories, which we need not take literally; but stories that deepen our faith and convey to us the kind of person Jesus was.

Compassion is the quintessential value of a life centered in God; and it is THE quintessential value of Jesus. Compassion is our sincere, heartfelt *caring* about one another. It is love, forgiveness and mercy all wrapped up in one.

In *pressing on towards the goal* of knowing and being like Christ, compassion thrives in our veins as well. When we are *like* Christ, compassion shines through our spirit.

II.

And because, for Paul, this is so important, such a critical part of his identity, Paul wants to make sure we know that he's not taking this for granted.

I do not consider that I have already made it, he says, ***forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to see what lies ahead. I press on ...***

A little humility is always good. There's a very real sense in our faith journey that none of us ever, totally, *make it*. *Making it* is not an end in our faith; it's a process. Our lives are a process of *making it*.

Right now you confirmands are moving towards the later years of your *pre-college* education. You're in the midst of the process of *making it* through high school.

But of course, with that, you're just getting started because I know you young ladies have plans beyond high school. You may even have plans beyond college. The point is, you have plans ... or a vision ... or a sense of your possibilities as you move along.

And all the time, in the grip of this process, it's important to *press on towards the goal*. I.e. ... to keep after it ... to sustain your focus. To *press on* is to keep your eyes on the prize.

Paul says, *I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus*.

Again, life is a process ... growing into a *likeness* of Christ takes time; indeed, it takes a life time. Understanding life as a process is important because so often, we get too caught up in the uncertainties and anxieties of the moment.

To remind ourselves that life is a process helps to cut us some slack. CHECK IT OUT:

1. None of us is going to be the same person tomorrow that we are today.
2. And to stretch it out a bit, we're not going to be the same person a year from now ... or five or ten years from now that we are at the moment.

What this says to us is this: while we are to *press on* in the present, we do this with the awareness that more is coming. Always in life, there is more to come.

III.

At the same time, there is always some sense of urgency in life. We don't have forever. Even a lifetime is not forever. We have to keep after it in life. Life tends to reward those who pay attention life and keep moving. Along with Paul, therefore, we have to keep *pressing on towards the goal*.

Paul always has a sense of life's urgency. It's a quality I like in him. Because to have a sense of life's urgency is to have a sense of the power of the moment. It's to have a sense—a conviction, really—that life matters. If the moment matters, then, extrapolating from that, life matters.

When life matters, when being alive to the promises of God matters, when coming to *know* and *be* like Christ matters, we have to pay attention. We have to focus and think and get organized ... and anticipate consequences. Again, we have to pay attention.

That's a good thing. That's also one of the things I like about TWITTER. I'm horrible with technology. At the same time, I know it's important. In fact, I know that if I don't make a considerable effort to keep up with technology, that every day I become a little more irrelevant.

I've never used TWITTER, but what I like about the concept is that you have to say whatever you want to say in 140 characters or less. TWITTER makes you pay attention to what you say and how you say it because you don't have forever.

Our lives are like that: we don't have forever.

IV.

As I move towards the conclusion of my message this morning, I urge you:

Be like Christ; whatever you do in life, let your spirit be filled with compassion. The world needs compassion.

And as your lives continue to unfold and blossom, as you continue to *press on* towards the wonder and the promise of the future that awaits you, remember—again—that life is a process. Whatever you are looking forward to in life, whatever your expectations; it doesn't have to happen all at once.

And always, no matter what comes your way, *keep after it ... press on ...* make your life count. Each of you has special stuff in you ... special gifts ... talents ... a uniqueness to your spirit. There has never been another person like you. Never forget that.

Confirmation is the tip of the iceberg in your faith journey. In a sense, you're in the early stages of faith development. When you hear me urge you to *be like Christ*, you may well be wondering *what on earth is he talking about?* I know that.

Trying to get *into* the faith ... trying to get *into* the Bible; this, too, is a process. To tell the truth, it takes a lifetime. But you gotta start somewhere. The key is to give it chance.

1. Go to church. We all know that churches aren't perfect. Nonetheless, they are wonderful gatherings of God's people. They are the place we come to get

connected as we live out our faith journey.

2. Secondly, read the Bible. This, too, takes a lifetime. But give the Bible a chance. Give it a chance to nurture you and to share its truth and wisdom with you.
3. Also, think about what it all means ... take time for reflection and discernment.
4. And lastly, pray about it. Talk to God and keep working on finding ways of practicing the presence of God in all things. Again, it's a process but give yourself to it.

V.

All of this is how you *press on towards the goal*. At the end of the day, it's a lifestyle. But you gotta do your part. Your parents have already done their part by getting you to this point.

So, in a sense, from this day forward, it's up to you. To keep on *pressing on towards the goal*. You won't be alone. God will be with you. The Holy Spirit will nudge you and guide you. And as you get to know Jesus, his teachings and his life will inspire you. They will lift you to a deeper sense of yourself, of who you are and who God created you to be.

Press on towards the goal!

All praise be unto God! Amen!

Dr. Jeffrey E. Frantz
Miami Lakes Congregational Church, *United Church of Christ*
6701 Miami Lakeway South
Miami Lakes, FL 33014
On the web at www.mlchurch.com