

“Feeling And Acting”
Proverbs 1:20-33
Psalm 19
James 3:1-12
Mark 8:27-38

Jesus teaches us to lose our life to find it. What does that mean? One possible answer is to learn humility and place the interests of the other person above our own. Another possibility is to begin the journey of balancing our priorities with God’s. And over the course of the journey, we learn that God aligns our priorities with God’s. Annie Dillard, the Pulitzer Prize winning author, tells the story of a time when she lived in rural Virginia and went to meet a neighbor for the first time. The neighbor came to the door and was cordial but appeared nervous. Dillard writes:

She did not let me go; she was worried about something else. She worked her hands. I waited on the other side of the screen door until she came out with it: “Do you know the Lord as your personal savior?” My heart went out to her. No wonder she had been so nervous. She must have to ask this of everyone, absolutely everyone, she meets. That is Christian witness. ... I wanted to make her as happy as possible, reward her courage, and run. We sympathize with that woman, don’t we? She embarrasses us a little, but we sympathize. Because Jesus told us that his disciples fish for people, and that his disciples are to be salt and light in the world. We have to shine if we follow Christ. We have to be salt. But how?¹

Losing one’s life to find it is a lifelong journey of having our words and deeds increasingly match the words and deeds of Jesus.

Losing one’s life and finding it is a process of change shaping us more and more into thinking, speaking, and living the words and deeds of Jesus. In this regard, Bobby Schuller in *Change Your Thoughts Change Your World* writes,

¹Annie Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk* (Harper Perennial, 2013), 98.

It's hard to take action in life when we just don't feel like it... We think about how much work it will be, we imagine all the bad things that could happen if we launch a new project, and we think about all the other stuff that sounds a lot more fun or relaxing. It's been said that emotions make great slaves but terrible masters. When we are feeling joyful, in love, excited, or like everything in life, emotions are great... But what happens when our emotions take a turn for the worse...? In these times, overthinking allows those negative emotions to become our master. We think and think and ultimately find a way to avoid the thing we need to do.²

Acting helps us breakthrough overthinking. Therein lies the significance of thinking and self-examination: Learn. Evaluate. Plan. Dream. Get back up after a fall. Press through the pain.³ Acting overcomes negative emotions.

The Old Testament, Psalter, Epistle, and Gospel Readings are all centered on the teaching and knowledge of wisdom. Wisdom is inseparable from God, a reflection of God, and evident in nature. Proverbs 1:1, 32-33 reads, "Wisdom cries out in the street; in the squares she raises her voice.... For waywardness kills the simple, and the complacency of fools destroys them; but those who listen to me will be secure and will live at ease, without dread of disaster." Psalm 19:1-2 reads, "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge." James 3:5-6 reads, "How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell." And Mark 8:34-35 reads, "He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose

²Bobby Schuller, *Change Your Thoughts Change Your World* (Nashville, Tennessee: Nelson Books, 2019), 77.

³Adapted from Bobby Schuller, *Change Your Thoughts Change Your World*, 33.

their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.” Each of these texts speaks of the interdependent relationship of wisdom between God and humans.

In Mark 8:27-38, we are cautioned not to spiritualize the text thus jeopardizing the political implications, not to decide that unless one is offensive, one is not a Christian, and not to assume that one’s minority views or ones that are opposed by society mark one as a Christian. Mark assists us in recognizing that uninformed and destructive notions of God damage faith communities and deform minds. Moreover, by taking Jesus seriously and picking up our cross and following him demonstrates that Jesus deconstructs patterns of power and privilege as forms of true discipleship and endorsed by God.⁴

True discipleship that is endorsed by God is one’s journey of losing self and finding life. Be wise. Pick up your cross. Feel and act on Jesus’ words, “I am the way, the truth and the life,” the words of the Greatest Commandment, and the words of the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount and Matthew 25. Those words demonstrate wisdom because they produce outcomes of being more like Jesus. Amen.

This sermon was preached (In-Person with COVID-19 protocols and Livestream due to the Coronavirus) on Sunday, 12 September 2021 by the Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh in the Sanctuary at Geneva Presbyterian Church in Laguna Woods, California

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⁴In the two paragraphs of textual analysis above, I have benefited from the thinking of Song-Mi Suzie Park, Glen G. Scorgie, Martha L. Moore-Keish, Robert W. Wall, Laura Sweat Holmes, Sandra Hack Polaski, and Leanne Van Dyk in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year B, Volume 3* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021), 300-303, 303-305, 306-309, 310-312, 312-313, 314-316 and 316-317.