

Sermon for Sunday, January 24, 1971 by Andrew A. Jumper, Pastor
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri

"HOW TO FIND YOURSELF"

St. Matthew 10:24-39

Text: "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it." St. Matthew 10:39

With the pro bowl today the football season comes to an end. Actually, it came to an end for me last week when the Dallas Cowboys lost the Superbowl! It has been a long season. I remember seeing a cartoon early last fall that pictured a man standing in front of a TV set getting ready to turn it on. To his wife he says, "Is there anything you want to say to me before the football season starts?"

When the offensive unit of a football team takes the field, it has but one consuming objective--to cross the opponents goal line. When the defensive unit checks into the game, their one united objective is to keep the other team from scoring. It is the unity of desire that holds a team together, that welds it into an effective offensive or defensive unit. Even an inferior team can rise to great heights if the players are inspired and motivated by a fierce and determined desire to win. Back when the football season was just beginning, most of us had already picked our favorites. But, as the season unfolded, Saturday after Saturday we saw some underdog team rise up and tumble some mighty team into the dust of the stadium. Their vision of victory, their desire to win, was great and stronger than that of their opponents and an upset occurred.

This is true in life as well. The person who is successful in life, the one who wins out over the worst sort of adversities and difficulties and troubles, is the person who is motivated by a goal. The people who succeed in life are those who have a vision, who have a burning desire to accomplish some particular and specific thing.

Most of us today are people who are trying to find ourselves. For example, persons in their early and middle teens are entering a whole new world. Their bodies have suddenly grown and changed. Socially they are beginning to struggle to relate themselves to others in a somewhat hostile world. Educationally they are beginning to think for themselves and have ideas of their own. And in this strange, new world they are trying to find themselves. Much of the so-called rebellion of teen-agers is not really rebellion. It is a way of giving vent to their insecurities and uncertainties, their fears and their tensions. College students are plagued by a somewhat different problem, but they, too, are trying to find themselves. They are entering that difficult and threatening stage when they must decide on a career, choose a mate, and make other decisions that will influence their whole lives. Young couples out in the world are trying to make a place for themselves, older people are trying to hold the place they have already made, and the retired are trying to adjust to the fact that they have now lost their place. So, there is really no time in life when we are not trying to discover who and what we are; there is really no time when we are not trying to find ourselves.

Modern psychology tells us that this is one of the most serious factors in mental health today. People by and large, they say, have not found themselves. We don't know where we are going in life, and if we are going in some particular direction, we don't know why. Sometimes it frightens us because we suddenly realize that life is slipping through our fingers--time runs out--and we awaken to the realization that somehow, somehow we just haven't gotten out of life the things we really wanted, the things we really intended to get.

The first thing I want to say this morning, then, is that in order to find ourselves, we must first lose self; in order to find our life, we must first lose it. Isn't that what our scripture for this morning said? Jesus said that in order to find life, we must first lose it. Let me put it another way. Life must be dominated by a consuming passion, a burning desire. We must fix our course on one bright star if our course is to be straight and true. Like a football team that is welded together by a great desire to win, so life must be dominated by some great vision.

If you would find yourself this is the first step--you must have some great dream, some great vision, a burning desire to accomplish some great thing. And the second step in finding yourself is like unto it! It is the other side of the same coin. That second step is this: you can have only one such vision, one such dream. You can give supreme loyalty to only one magnificent goal.

Now, let me put that another way! Man can serve only one ultimate loyalty. There is only one thing that can dominate his life, his talents, his ability, his heart. As long as there is more than one great dream in his heart, man can never really lose himself because he will be torn between the two. Do you remember how Jesus put it? He said, "No man can serve two masters for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will cling to the one and despise the other." If a man is going to be a great scientist, the sum total of his abilities must be zeroed-in on this ambition. If he is going to be a great doctor, the love of medicine must consume his life. And if a man is going to be great in any field--then the love of that vision must be the focus, the dominating influence of his life.

Of course, it is right here that so many of us run into trouble. In order to find life we must first lose it and we can lose it to only one great dream, one great vision, of the heart. And the very reason that most of us have never found ourselves is because we are not willing to so lose ourselves. We are not willing to pay the price of a dream; we are not willing to make the sacrifice demanded by a great vision. We are not willing to undergo the discipline of a great vision. Most of us have not found ourselves because we are the kind of person Jesus would describe as having put our hand to the plow, but we keep looking back. We are like the man who wrote this little poem:

I'll go where you want me to go, dear Lord,
Real service is what I desire.

I'll say what you want me to say, dear Lord--
But don't ask me to sing in the choir.

I'll do what you want me to do, dear Lord,
I yearn for the kingdom to thrive.

I'll give you my nickels and dimes, dear Lord--
But please don't ask me to tithe.

Isn't this pretty much a picture of most of us? But has such a person found himself spiritually? Has he lost himself in loyalty to God is his heart dominated by a supreme loyalty to one magnificent goal? Well, you know the answer to that!

So the first principle of finding yourself is to have a great dream, a magnificent vision of the heart. The second is that you can have only one such goal, one such ultimate loyalty, for no man can serve two masters. The third principle for finding yourself is this: Your dream--the vision of the heart--must be worthwhile. Lots of people have lost their lives in loyalty to one great dream, but their dream proved to be empty and unsatisfying simply because it was not worthwhile. I once

heard Billy Graham tell of an acquaintance who was very wealthy. This man lost himself in the consuming passion to make money. Yet one day he awoke to the realization that his wealth was ashes in his hands, and his dream was shattered. In the final analysis his vision failed him because it was not worthy. He said to Dr. Graham, "Billy, it's not worth it--it's not worth it."

What is your dream this morning? What is your ambition? What is the motivating force in your life? Is it worthwhile, is it worthy? Jesus once told a parable about a man who had an unworthy vision of the heart. He discovered his barns could no longer hold all his goods. He tore them all down and built bigger barns. But God said to him, "Thou fool. This night is thy soul required of thee." He was a fool not because he possessed great wealth, but because his wealth was the controlling passion in his life--he had lost himself in one great loyalty that was not worthy.

Yes, what are our dreams, our visions, our driving ambitions this morning? We need to keep asking ourselves that question, do we not? You young people--what is the vision before you, what is the star on which you have fixed your course? Is it worthy? Is it really worthwhile? And the rest of us--what about us? We are working and struggling and striving--but for what? What is this hill up which we climb; what is this goal for which we strive, what is this treasure for which we labor--is it really worthwhile?

Let me suggest finally, then, that while we can have only one ultimate loyalty that is worthwhile if we are to find ourselves, the one over-riding vision of the heart that is really worthwhile is Jesus Christ.

Back during the second World War, during the "Battle of the Bulge", a young man named Robert Bolinder from Hackensack, New Jersey, flew his P-61 Black Widow night fighter against the enemy awful night after awful night. When those terrible days were over, he packed his medals and returned home. He had received the Silver Star, the Air Medal, nine Oak Leaf Bronze Clusters, five Battle Stars and a Presidential Squadron Citation. When he returned home he entered seminary, but word soon came calling him to Washington. There Lord Halifax presented to him England's coveted Distinguished Flying Cross. At the presentation Robert Bolinder said, "I was ready to die for my country, and now I'm ready to burn myself out for Christ. I can never be content until I have served Christ as well as I have served my nation." Over the battle fields of Europe, with death and destruction all about him, he had learned a great lesson. He had learned that ultimately the only thing in life that is really worthwhile is service in the name of Jesus Christ--a life that is fixed and focused on him.

So many of us today are lost. We do not know where we are going nor why. If we are to find ourselves--if life is to be worth living, we must have some great vision, some great dream in the heart, some star on which we fix our course. We can have only one such star, for no man can sail two courses, therefore, if our course is to be worth sailing, if our dream is not to destroy us, it must be worthwhile. And finally, the most worthwhile thing of all, the grandest over-riding, all-consuming vision a man can have, is a life that is fixed on Jesus, that whether he be doctor, or lawyer, or teacher or housewife or whatever, he is doing it to the glory of Christ for his eye is fixed on him.

Several years ago I took some graduate work in pastoral counseling and clinical psychotherapy. Part of my duties was to serve as chaplain in the charity ward of one of Houston's large hospitals. This included the Negro ward as well. There, with those simple people of deep faith, I learned much from them as I warmed my soul at

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