

Keep your eyes on the road, but keep your sight on the goal

Message for Sunday, January 15, 2017
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: John 1:29-34; 3:22-30

Children's Message:

Mark 1:5, New International Version:

The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. ["him" = John the Baptist]

John the Baptist was very popular. More than a hundred thousand people came out to see him and listen to his messages. Most were baptized as a sign of repentance: stop doing bad things, and turn their life back to God. He was famous all through the land.

And yet being a celebrity did not go to his head. He was not full of pride. He didn't buy a suit of fancy clothes. He didn't hang around with the rich and beautiful people. He just kept on doing the work God had given him to do: to tell people about Jesus coming.

The people thought John was the Saviour God had promised. John was quick to tell them, "Oh no, you've got the wrong person. You may think I'm really something, but the truth is, I'm nothing. Compared to the one who is coming, I'm a nobody. I'm not good enough even to wipe the mud from his boots."

Some day you may be the most popular kid in your class. You might become famous, with strangers wanting to take a selfie with you. There's nothing wrong with that. But just remember this: remember John the Baptist. Remember how he was humble. Remember how he kept doing the work God had given him to do. Remember that he trusted Jesus.

Message "Keep your eyes on the road, but keep your sight on the goal"

1) Behold, the Lamb of God!

Jesus made quite an impression on the world when he was born. Angels sang about him; shepherds left their flocks to go and see him; wise men travelled from afar to present their gifts; Herod killed all the baby boys in his attempt to get the future king. But for the next thirty years or so, Jesus was largely

forgotten. Not by everyone, though. Luke's gospel tells us twice that "Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart" [Luke 2:19; very similar to Luke 2:51].

For most people who knew Jesus, he was simply "Joseph and Mary's son." When Jesus went with the crowds to be baptized by John the Baptist, no one would notice anything unusual about that.

John was the only one who recognized him as someone special. Here is John's testimony:

John 1:29-30, 32-34, New Revised Standard Version:
The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'.... And John testified, 'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."

That's quite a jump, to go from being unknown to being proclaimed as the Messiah, the Son of God! That marked the beginning of Jesus' ministry. It also was the beginning of the end for John the Baptist.

2) It's an honour to take the back seat when Jesus is the driver

From that time on, the ministry of John the Baptist began to diminish, while the crowds flocked to see Jesus, to hear him, to be healed by him. Was John jealous? Did he smolder inside because he was bumped to second place? Not at all!

John 3:26-30, New Living Translation:

John's disciples came to him and said, "Teacher, the man you met on the other side of the Jordan River, the one you said was the Messiah, is also baptizing people. And everybody is going over there instead of coming here to us."

John replied, "God in heaven appoints each person's work. You yourselves know how plainly I told you that I am not the Messiah. I am here to prepare the way for him—that is all. The bride will go where the bridegroom is. A bridegroom's friend rejoices with him. I am the bridegroom's friend, and I am filled with

joy at his success. He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less.

It would have been perfectly natural for John to take offense at this: “I’ve worked hard all these years, I’ve sacrificed, and this is the thanks I get?” But John never lost sight of his goal, even when success came his way. His purpose was to prepare the way for Jesus. So when that came true, rather than feeling deflated, he was elated. It’s an honour to take the back seat when Jesus is the driver.

3) Keep your eyes on the road in front of you; but keep your sight on the goal

In our lives as well, it’s so easy to lose sight of the goal. This can happen in good times or bad times.

Sports is a good example. And I don’t mean the super-stars who have a temper tantrum because they don’t make enough millions. Let’s say a young man named Adam joins the local hockey league to get some exercise, have fun, and play around with his friends. His team turns out to be pretty good, and they start winning games. Pretty soon the desire to win takes over. Adam starts pushing and shoving. An elbow here, a stick there, name calling, swearing, and then a fight—whatever happened to having fun?

Maybe you’ve experienced something similar in your life. You begin with a certain goal, but somewhere along the way life gets complicated. This happens in marriages, in families, at work ... anywhere.

John the Baptist never lost sight of what was his primary goal in life: to serve his Lord. That may be something to consider if you find yourself caught up in the rat race.

4) What is your goal?

In my message last week, I challenged all of us to have goals for how we will grow this year.

J.C. Penney, who established the huge American clothing store called “J.C. Penney” once said:

“Give me a stock clerk with a goal and I’ll show you a man who will make history; show me a man without a goal and I’ll show you a stock clerk.”

It’s obvious, however, that not everything we for which we have a passing fancy — or even a continuous craving — is worthy of being the goal for our lives.

Our ultimate goal is to love and serve God, and the people with whom he places us in contact. Perhaps the best way to stay on track is to focus on the One whose life we are trying to follow. It works like the boy in this story.

Snow covered the ground where three boys were playing. A man came along and said to them, “Would you like to try a race and the winner receive a prize?”

The boys agreed and the man told them that his race was to be different. “I will go to the other side of the field,” he said, “and when I give you the signal, you will start to run. The one whose footsteps are the straightest in the snow will be the winner.”

The race began and the first boy kept looking behind him to see if his steps were straight. The second lad kept looking at his companions to see what they were doing; but the third boy just ran on with his eyes fixed on the man on the other side of the field.

The third boy was the winner, for his footsteps were straight in the snow. He had kept his eyes on the goal ahead of him.

Jesus is the one we keep our eyes on. Knowing him, loving him, serving him is our primary goal. But we also learn from Jesus in choosing other goals.

For example, if your goal is to become more caring in your relationships with other people, think of how Jesus treated other people; then copy that in your own life.

If your goal is to be a better parent, you obviously can’t copy Jesus’ example of parenting. But you can follow the principles he modelled in his relationship with the disciples, such as unconditional love for the disciples, even when they made glaring errors, were selfish, or even turned away from him.

The point is: if you don’t have goals, you’re going to accomplish little.

5) What is our goal as a congregation?

This principle, keeping our sights on Jesus Christ as our goal and model, also applies to our life as a congregation. This is important to keep in mind as we approach the season for our annual meeting, where we set some goals for the coming year.

A person or a church without a goal is like a ship without a rudder. Each will drift instead of drive. How easy it is to assume that lots of activity equals accomplishment.

John Henry Fabre, a biologist in France, did an experiment which showed how true this is. Processionary caterpillars have an instinct which causes them to blindly follow the one in front of them. That's why they're called "processionary caterpillars."

Fabre took a clay flower pot, and arranged a number of these caterpillars in a circle around the rim, so that the lead caterpillar touched the last one, making a complete circle. On top of the soil in the pot he put pine needles, which is food for the Processionary Caterpillar. The caterpillars started around this circular flower pot. Around and around they went, hour after hour, day after day, night after night.

For seven full days and seven full nights they went around the flower pot. Finally, they dropped dead of starvation and exhaustion. With an abundance of food just an inch away, they starved to death.

In your life, in the church, we can be busy doing all kinds of things. But if they are not helping us fulfil our goal as servants of Jesus Christ and servants of the people around us, we accomplish little.

When we keep sight of our goal, we can accomplish great things for God.

Next Steps:

- Pray. Pray about two things in particular:
 - Commit myself to being one who loves and serves Jesus.
 - Ask for wisdom in how I/the church can love and serve the people around me/us.
- Plan. Think about how I/we can do this. Share ideas with others. Get excited!
- Act. Great ideas aren't great if they never happen. Especially do things with others: it's way more fun that way, and you share the enthusiasm.