



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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### DESPERATE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Scripture: Isaiah 55:1-3; 12

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#### ILLUSTRATION

Many of you remember my stepson, Marcie's son, **BILLY**. Billy lived all 31 years of his life in a wheelchair, unable to walk due to Muscular Dystrophy. We had his funeral right here in this sanctuary back in 2002.

When Billy was 25, he got a job with a large company in Southfield as a computer programmer. It was such a breakthrough, cause up until that time all he could get were telemarketing-type jobs. But he had persisted in getting the training he needed, and this job opened a whole new vista.

Billy & Marcie were talking around the dinner table a few weeks into it. They were saying, "*how exciting it was*" and "*what a change this will bring*". But Billy said, "*You know, Mom, the thing I like the most about this job is that it makes me feel useful.*" The only thing Billy ever wanted out of life was to be useful!

He held that job for about 5 years. Then breathing problems developed, and we lost him just after the 4<sup>th</sup> of July in 2002 (the 6<sup>th</sup>, to be exact).

Many of you were at his funeral. You recall story after story about how Billy's life had been an inspiration. People spoke who had various troubles & distresses, saying they felt they'd been dealt some pretty harsh blows. But when they saw how Billy had worked through a life-limiting handicap, it moved them to do the same.

A father of one of his high school friends said: "*I've never known anyone who was dealt such a small hand but did so much with it.*"

Even those from *Review Works*, the company he'd worked for, spoke of how amazed they were at how well he functioned in spite of the struggle just to get to work. . .how well he always did his job. . .how well-liked he was. . .and how he never complained.

You see, Billy's life ended up being very useful! But it wasn't just the job. Dozens & dozens of cards poured in from friends and people saying how he had touched their lives.

## SCRIPTURE

Isn't Billy's cry "*to be useful*" that of all of us?

We have a hunger, a drive, a need to feel needed. . .useful. . .SIGNIFICANT. . .fulfilled.

In college I read book that's now a classic: Victor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*. How amazing that the people who survived ordeals like the holocaust and prison camps of the war years were those who had found a sense of direction or purpose or meaning for their lives.

One of our *desperations* is to make a difference. . .to make a contribution. . .to be MORE than we ever thought we could be. . .to give ourselves to something greater than ourselves. We all want to leave our mark. . .to make an impact.

That is reflected in our **Scripture** for today—found in **ISAIAH 55:1-3**:

<sup>1</sup> **"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money. Come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.**

*[i.e.: obtain what money cannot buy]*

<sup>2</sup> **Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?**

*[i.e.: what doesn't count in the long run]*

**Listen to me, eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.**

<sup>3</sup> **Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live."**

## MESSAGE

Last week, we talked about the fact that we all want to feel better. . .we want a quick fix. How desperate we are to ESCAPE pain and hardship. . .to get away from a situation that's troubling us. But, I submit to you that we are also desperate to PLUG IN to something greater than us.

The reason for this is that you & I were made for a MISSION. As we read in *The Purpose Driven Life* last year, we were created ON PURPOSE. . .and FOR A PURPOSE. And it may only be marginally tied in with what you do for a living (i.e.: job, vocation). You were made to serve God. . .to become part of what He is up to in this world. Our main job is to find out what that is and get in step with it.

**Psalm 103:4 – “He redeems your life from the pit [*the pit of destruction where life is squandered and wasted*] and crowns you with love and compassion.”**

God is at work in the world, and He wants you to join Him. Not cause He needs you; He is all-sufficient on His own. It's just the way He has made us—to be involved, to do something of significance for Him.

Just before He went to the cross, Jesus prayed for those who would continue behind him. His prayer is recorded in **John 17 (vv. 15-18)**. He said:

**“My prayer is not that You would take them out of the world” . . . but that You would “sanctify them” (i.e.: set them apart for sacred use).**

He went on to say: **“As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world” [NIV]. “In the same way that You gave me a mission in the world, I give them a mission in the world” [The Message].**

What is that mission? In a nutshell, it's **introducing people to God!**

You say: “Maybe that's your mission because you're a pastor. I'm not sure it's mine.”

Paul says in **Acts 20:24** – **“I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the Gospel of God's grace.”**

But is that everyone's task? The Bible seems to indicate that it is—because we are the Body of Christ. And, as such, we continue Jesus' mission on earth.

Ø At the age of 12, Jesus said: *“I must be about my Father's business.”*

Ø Dying on the cross, on the other end of his earthly life, he declared: *“It is finished.”*

I want to suggest to you this morning that ultimately: **The universal drive for significance, the desperate need we have to spend our life for something that counts is met when we too are “about our Father's business” . . . when we are fitting into God's purpose. And that purpose seems to revolve around introducing people to Him.**

Please note, I didn't say: *“Our purpose is to save the world.”* Our purpose is to introduce others to the One who can do that. **ILLUSTRATION**: It's like being a match-maker! You introduce your best friend to another good friend. . . they begin a relationship. . . lo & behold, before you know it there's a wedding.

Oh, what peace & joy of knowing God has given you something to do and that you are doing it.

## STORY

I remember a classmate of mine back in college. He could play the violin like nobody I'd ever heard. He was equally comfortable playing the old hymns of the church, snappy jazz tunes, or heavy symphonic music.

He told me once that his life ambition had been to be an athlete—an Olympic quality athlete—till an injury shattered his dream. His parents placed a violin in his hands, presumably as a “compensation”. He began to pour his energies into it. When he was a senior in high school, a representative from Julliard came and interviewed him.

He was about to be awarded a scholarship when God began to speak to his heart: “*What if I asked you to go to the mission field? Would you be willing?*”

*“But Lord, I thought I was supposed to be a concert musician?”*

*“I have another plan for your life”,* the Lord seemed to say.

He was afraid that yet another thing of value was being taken from him! But when he finally said *YES*, he found the violin was put back in his hands. He declined the offer to go to Julliard and came instead to our small Xn. college to study missions and music.

It isn't always to full-time (vocational) ministry; sometimes it goes the other way. Marcie & I heard an operatic baritone who sings for the New York City Opera last year, whose calling is to sing for the glory of God in a very secular setting. And he makes no bones about it to his colleagues!

What's important here is that all of us are called to “*declare His glory among the nations.*”

If it means abandoning our agenda and accepting God's, so be it!

Paul said in **Romans 6:13b** – “**Offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to Him as instruments of righteousness.**”

### APPLICATION

So, all of us are yearning for significance. We are longing for more than the endless cycle of routine busyness. We want our lives to BE A MESSAGE and to SPEAK A MESSAGE. You may be here this morning, saying: “*I want my life to count for God. I want to be about His business. BUT HOW???*”

Grow closer to Him. Then ask Him to give you a passion for something He cares about deeply so you can be a spokesman for Him in the world. It may be a passion about a problem, a cause, a principle, a group of people. Whatever it is, you will feel compelled to speak up about it and do what you can to make a difference. You'll be like DAVID, who said: “*My zeal for God and His work burns hot within me*”. . . or JEREMIAH, who said: “*Your message burns in my heart and bones, and I cannot keep silent.*”

God may give you a godly passion to champion a **CAUSE**. It may be a problem you've personally experienced [e.g.: abuse / addiction / infertility / depression / a disease].

God may give you a godly passion to **SPEAK UP FOR A GROUP OF OTHERS** who can't speak for themselves [e.g.: the unborn / the persecuted / the poor / the imprisoned / the mis-treated / the disadvantaged / those who are denied justice]. The Bible is full of commands to *defend the defenseless*.

God may give you a passion to **FURTHER HIS KINGDOM** [e.g.: to start a new ministry / to strengthen families / to fund or do mission work / to train up Christian leaders].

He may give you a godly passion to **REACH A PARTICULAR GROUP OF PEOPLE** with the Gospel [e.g.: businessmen / teenagers / university students (internationals or domestic) / young mothers / athletes]. If you ask God, He may burden your heart for a particular group of people (ethnic or otherwise) that desperately needs a strong Christian witness.

That's the neat thing about all this: God has given us different passions so that everything He wants done in the world will get done! Each of us has a *life message*; but no one of us can say it all.

Bottom Line: 1) You were made for a mission.

2) That mission involves pointing others to God.

3) You can fulfill it / make a difference in this world by discovering & pursuing your passions.

Ø Don't say you're too old. The fastest growing group of servants in the church are the retired (especially "newly"). . . followed by mothers whose children are grown up enough to be fairly self-sufficient.

Ø I'll never forget being moved by Bruce Wilkinson at a *Promise Keeper's* conference. Bruce champions the fight against AIDS in Africa. He challenged retirees to not get those golf clubs out just yet, there is work to be done in Africa.

## CONCLUSION

HERE'S ANOTHER STORY FROM MARCIE'S LIFE. . .

[We have this arrangement: When I preach, she feeds me stories. When she speaks, I feed her Scriptures.] □

Marcie's first husband, BILL, worked in steel manufacturing all his life. The environments he worked in were very "*macho*"—lots of talk about hunting, football, and beer blasts.

Bill looked the part. He could talk the talk. But he never felt very free to show any other side of his personality. . . that is, until he got this one new job.

The boss of this new job also fit the mold of all the others who worked in the steel industry.

He was not a wimpy guy; indeed, he was well-liked and respected.

One day, Bill went to work earlier than usual. He had some paperwork to catch up on. The boss' car was there. He had a couple questions, so he gently knocked on the door and it pushed open. The boss was sitting at his desk; it was obvious that he was reading his Bible. He looked up when Bill entered, but made no move to hide or cover up.

They talked about the work-related questions. Then Bill, "*Was that the Bible you were reading?*" His boss said *YES*, that he always liked to start the day that way. He didn't seem embarrassed in the least. This led to, "*Well, where do you go to church?*" and a whole discussion, in which the boss shared that he belonged to a small fellowship group of men that got together each week to study the Scriptures and pray for one another. From that point on, they talked often about matters of faith. And Bill felt comfortable enough to bring his Bible to work and keep it on his desk.

**POINT:** This man didn't push his faith on Bill. **He simply allowed himself to be caught!**

Let me ask you a COUPLE QUESTIONS in closing. . .

1. Have you allowed yourself to get caught lately (living out your faith)?
2. Is anyone going to be in heaven because of you? Will anyone come up to you and say:  
*"That conversation we had. . ."* *"The way you stood by me. . ."* *"The invitation to a small group. . ."* *"The stand you took. . ."*

Ø Maybe you're a link in a long chain of people, influences, conversations, events.

Ø Or maybe you're the midwife that witnesses the birth of a person into the Kingdom of God.

What JOY there is in serving the Lord! What fulfillment when you spend the capital of your life (e.g.: money / time / energy) on what really does matter, on what really will in the long run satisfy. . .when you let your passions move you to minister in His name. . .when you allow yourself to get caught in the act!

In **ISAIAH 55**—the chapter we read out of earlier—there's a dramatic picture of the Israelites coming out of bondage, full of joy at the prospect of once again being useful to God and used by God as His chosen people. . .of being a light to the world, introducing people to God. They're coming out of Babylon singing & shouting for joy. They're so full of it that verse 12 says even the trees of the field sing & shout with them. In *The Message*, it reads:

*You will go out in joy, and be led into a whole new life that's complete.*

*The mountains and hills will lead the parade, bursting with song.*

*All the trees of the forest will join the procession, exuberant with applause.*

There's a song based on that verse I'd like us to close with. As you go out into the world this week, let your evangelism be "*go & show*" (not "*come & see*"). Remember you are "*embedded*" in the

culture as a reporter is in a combat zone. So go out there and let yourself be caught living for Jesus; and don't be afraid to exhibit the joy of being a follower of his.

Let's sing. . . . .

### THE TREES OF THE FIELD

*You shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace*

*The mountains and the hills will break forth before you*

*There'll be shouts of joy, and all the trees of the field will clap, will clap their hands*

*And all the trees of the field will clap their hands*

*The trees of the field will clap their hands*

*The trees of the field will clap their hands and you'll go out with joy*