

Getting Some Direction

Presented By Pastor Scott Walters on 1/27/19
At Crossroads United Methodist Church
Waunakee, WI

I have in my desk drawer this little collection for fortunes from fortune cookies that I've kept from the last five years or so.

My collection is what you'd call a specialized collection. I am not interested in fortunes that have wise sayings. I can find those in the book of Proverbs.

The fortunes I'm particularly interested in are actual predictions. Let me give you a few examples from my collection:

"You will take a chance in the near future."

"This coming Friday will be an exciting time for you."

"A fun party is soon to be in your future."

"The night life is for you."

"Someone is interested in you. Keep your eyes open."

"The mysterious side of your nature makes you most alluring."

"Ignore previous cookie."

While I've had a lot of fun with these fortunes -- I have to tell you most of them haven't been all that accurate. In one way or another, there are a lot of people who may not depend on fortune cookies for direction and meaning in their life -- are still looking in different areas for answers.

One popular approach is a trip to Barnes and Noble. You see it all the time--people wandering around a display table, picking up a book, reading the comments on the dust jacket or skimming through the table of contents. Then they'll put it down and pick up another. This is not the fiction table. No one here is looking for a "good read" on their next plane trip.

It's in the self-help area and the books that deal with relationships and to a lesser extent books about Christianity or religion. The hope is that some phrase will strike a chord, or a paragraph will offer a clear word about life, about your life, my life. The hope that springs eternal is that we will catch a sense, of our true selves; that we will find a solution to our dilemma of what life is supposed to be about.

What a strange thing. Regular people you see in our worship who had been scared away from the Bible by those whose use of it had turned them off, from it.

Trust me on this: the reason for promoting regular study of the Bible and our faith is not to turn you all into overzealous, proof-texters of the Bible. But, it's to provide us with insight into who we are meant to be, to provide insights to help us deal with life's perplexing questions.

Take, for example, the passage we read from Luke a few minutes ago. Jesus, returning to his hometown of Nazareth, goes into the synagogue, and as a visitor, and is given the opportunity to read the scripture for the day. So he reads a passage from the book of Isaiah that says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Then he tells those who are gathered there that this passage--this word of prophecy--is beginning to be accomplished right then and there.

Those who were present in that synagogue got a glimpse of what God was all about and what they too would be about **if** they followed this Jesus. Here were words of purpose. What Jesus read, spoke to the questions of that day--and this.

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So years later, we can hear these same words speaking to our questions about life's purpose. After hours of searching through advice columns and best seller lists, after endless journeys up and down the information highway, we find ourselves drawn back to what for many of us are our roots, back to the Bible that we had left behind or had surrendered to someone else. And if we are open to it, we discover that it holds some answers to our most perplexing questions.

What life is supposed to be about is bringing good news to the poor and release to the captives. Really? But what if that is not my thing? What if I don't have a lot of contact with the poor and the oppressed and the captives? Oh, but you do! You hear their questions at the treat table at work. You see them at McDonald's or at "M & M's" on the bus pouring over the "Dear Abby" column.

And you may just discover them sitting in the pew beside you on Sunday morning. They are the ones who are searching for some good news.

But, we will always have questions. Our journeys—go on. Our questions are always looking to find answers. What we have to offer is not a final answer, but a resource; a path toward purpose, an idea, an insight, an image, to work from, to build on.

For Paul that idea; that image was "a body," a body composed of many different parts: eyes and ears, fingers and toes, bones and organs. Our purpose, he said, isn't to turn everyone into two ears. That would be contributing to the very oppression we are charged to overcome! Nor is it to praise some parts to the detriment and devaluing of others.

Indeed each part of the body has its unique purpose, and by its uniqueness, it makes its contributions to the functioning of the whole. And as that whole body functions together, we each discover our importance, our purpose.

So what is my purpose? What is life supposed to be about? It's not enough to be able to say that life is good and that we are part of a nice group of people. The answer to these questions needs to be something that we can grab hold of, hang on to. That kind of an answer will not show up in a self-help book or a fortune cookie.

Most of these sources can't and won't tell you what those folks

in Nazareth heard. They won't tell you what we heard today. That "the Spirit of the Lord is upon us," that we have been appointed and anointed to a particular task: to bring good news to the poor and oppressed, to set the captives free.

Some might refer to it as a challenge, but I think it is also appropriate to refer to it as our answer to that lingering, inescapable, haunting question: "What is life supposed to be about?" It is about understanding that we are not orphans adrift in a hostile world. It's about being able to share with others the good news that we are all part of the body, that we are loved and valued.

It is about demonstrating that there is a place at God's family table for everyone, that beyond doubt and struggle and pain and fear, there is hope—and in that hope we find our purpose, we discover the way we are all intended to live.