

Philippians 3:4b-14

“Resume Available Upon Request”

October 8, 2017

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This morning’s text portrays a reversal of fortune – so to speak.

Though it is different kind of reversal of fortune.

In today’s text, we have the Apostle Paul – a guy who has it all – speak against all that he has.

Paul has reason to boast and he proves it by sharing his upbringing...his pedigree. He lays out his curriculum vitae, if you will, and shows us a resume which reads like an A-List celebrity.

- Jewish by birth.
- Circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day – as required by Law.
- Descended from tribe of Benjamin – the tribe which remained faithful to the house of David.
- “A Hebrew born of Hebrews” – a man born of pure Hebrew stock.

His resume continues...In addition to his inherited privileges:

Paul excelled at all things Jewish.

A member of a small sect of Pharisees, who:

- Faithfully upheld the law
- Spelled out implications for every regulation of the law so as to avoid accidental infringements.
- Followed the Levitical rules of purity & believed these rules applied to all Jews since the whole nation is to be holy to God.

In addition to his Pharisaic pedigree, Paul had a zeal for the law as evidenced in his persecution of the church.

- You might recall how those who stoned Stephen, the first Christian martyr, to death were said to have laid their cloaks at the feet of Paul – i.e. he was the one who sanctioned the death.

According to Pharisaic standards, Paul is one considered to be blameless under the law.

And then, Paul does the unexpected. **[crumple paper & toss aside as telling story]**

He takes his well-crafted, neatly typed out resume...he crumples it up and throws it away.

Paul declares these “credentials” as privileges he once possessed.

According to his resume, Paul is blameless and righteous according to the law...and then, he had that Damascus road encounter – a face-to-face meeting with the risen Christ and he began to see life in different light.

Perhaps there is another gauge of righteousness & blamelessness? One that is God driven?

And so, like Marie Kondo's tidying up method, the Apostle Paul, has undergone a kind of spiritual inventory and concludes that some things are important and some things are not – and he is choosing to hold on to what is important. Like Kondo's method, he has discerned, *“...the important thing is deciding what you want to keep in your life.”*<sup>1</sup>

Paul speaks of the advantages enjoyed as a result of his being “in Christ.” The things he once regarded as assets are written off as loss “for Christ's sake.” Paul's pinnacle statement leaves no doubt that the gain of being “in Christ” far outweighs the value of everything Paul once possessed.

*“...For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish<sup>2</sup>, in order that I may gain Christ.” (3.8)*

Paul willingly & joyfully abandons things he no longer values.

For Paul, the things he now prizes are:

*Knowing* Christ

*Being* found in Christ

*Having* a righteousness which comes from God

All of which find expression, for Paul, in the acknowledgement that Christ's actions are God's self-revelation & a recognition that Christ's claim upon our lives leads to our adopting a similar pattern for how we live our lives.

Paul might say it like this, “Our Christian walk must match our Christian talk.”

Paul's transformation has helped him discover that loving each other was more important than living according to a set of rules. God can be worshipped and served in the ways we relate to others and the way we live our everyday lives.

Paul is sending out a clarion call for Christians to become that which they already are – God's beloved creations who are blessed to be blessings.

Martin Luther put it this way, “...the nature of a Christian does not lie in what he or she has become, but in what that person is becoming.”<sup>3</sup>

We work it out – one thought at a time / one choice at a time / one day at a time – for we have not yet arrived and we are still in process to become the creations God intends.

Henri Nouwen was a Dutch Catholic Priest who taught for nearly two decades at the University of Notre Dame, as well as Yale and Harvard Universities. He left academia to be pastor of the L'Arche Daybreak community in Toronto where he shared his life with men and women with physical & developmental delays.

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<sup>1</sup> Quote taken from preface to Kondo's book [Spark Joy: An Illustrated Master Class on the Art of Organizing and Tidying Up](https://read.amazon.com/kp/embed?asin=B00Y6QG5D0&tag=bing08-20&linkCode=kpp&reshareId=T4H296ZDCFDNV7KJDVKM&reshareChannel=system). Found at: <https://read.amazon.com/kp/embed?asin=B00Y6QG5D0&tag=bing08-20&linkCode=kpp&reshareId=T4H296ZDCFDNV7KJDVKM&reshareChannel=system>

<sup>2</sup> The Greek is “refuse” ... “dung”

<sup>3</sup> New Interpreters Bible, vol. XI, Abingdon Press: Nashville, 2000, p. 531.

Nouwen talked often about how we base our lives on *what we have, what we do and what other people think about us*. He highlighted how we look back when we're older and point to our trophies and say, 'You see: I really was of value.' Nouwen proposes a new way to view our lives,

*"Instead, the truth about us is that we are God's beloved daughters and sons, and our lives need to be lived out of that truth."<sup>4</sup>*

Paul captures this when he writes,

*"Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own."* (3.12)

A better translation of this verse is found in the New international Version,

*"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on **to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.**"* (3.12 – NIV)

Paul – of all people – knows what it means when Christ "takes hold" of a life.

To paraphrase *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*, "Life gets flipped, turned upside down."

Priorities are re-ordered.

Stories are re-narrated.

Lives are re-oriented.

Take Joe, for instance, Joe was miraculously converted at a men's shelter. Prior to his conversion, he had gained the reputation of being nothing more than a dirty homeless person for whom there was no hope. He was thought of as a miserable ghetto resident. Following his transformation which came as a result of his *being found in Christ*, everything changed.

As Rev. Wright's, 2 Corinthians 5:17 sermon series taught us, "...everything old has passed away; see everything has become new!"

Joe became the most caring person anyone associated with the mission had ever known. Joe spent his days and nights at the mission. Did whatever needed done. Never considered anything he was asked to do as beneath him. Joe did what was asked with gratitude for the chance to help. Whether it was mopping up vomit in the hallway or scrubbing toilets after carelessness left the men's room filthy. Joe fed men who wandered into the mission and made sure those who were too out of it to care of themselves got safely into bed.

One evening, the director of the mission was delivering his evening evangelistic message. The usual crowd had shown up. Sitting on the rickety metal chairs was a group of sullen men with drooped heads.

One man came down the aisle and knelt in prayer before the director. This man cried out to God to help him change. The man kept shouting, "Make me like Joe! Make me like Joe! Make me like Joe!"

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<sup>4</sup> This illustration taken from Homiletics Online:

[https://www.homileticonline.com/subscriber/printer\\_friendly\\_installment.asp?installment\\_id=93040408](https://www.homileticonline.com/subscriber/printer_friendly_installment.asp?installment_id=93040408)

The director of the mission leaned over and said, "Son, I think you mean, 'Make me like Jesus.'" Looking up at the director with a quizzical expression on his face, the man asked, "Is Jesus like Joe?"<sup>5</sup>

Priorities, Stories, Lives  
Re-ordered, Re-narrated, Re-oriented  
When Christian talk matches Christian walk.

Alleluia & Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> This story was adapted from the story "Make Me Like Joe" found at: <http://www.all-creatures.org/stories/makeme.html> the author of this story is unknown.