

Genesis 32:22-31

The same night he got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, 'Let me go, for the day is breaking.' But Jacob said, 'I will not let you go, unless you bless me.' So he said to him, 'What is your name?' And he said, 'Jacob.' Then the man said, 'You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed.' Then Jacob asked him, 'Please tell me your name.' But he said, 'Why is it that you ask my name?' And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, 'For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.' The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip.

Psalm 131

O Lord, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; my soul is like the weaned child that is with me. O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time on and for evermore.

Charles Schuster
"For the Love of It"
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I think it was Socrates, it may have been Plato, or maybe it was your grandmother who said, "The unexamined life is not worth living." Actually, it was Socrates. The unexamined life. Historian and author Daniel Boorstin. He said, "I write to discover what I think." How do we determine what we think if not by writing down our thoughts? That's one way. How do we come to understand what we believe, if not by doing what we believe to be right, and then examining why we are doing it? Once Charles Berkeley, the overweight, over-achieving, outspoken, now-retired NBA basketball player, was quoted as having said something that sounded absolutely ridiculous. He claimed he never said it. The reporter who asked him about it told him that the quote was in his own autobiography. In response to that revelation, Charles Berkeley replied, "I should have read it."

The unexamined life is not worth living, and it's time to determine what we think, and it may take writing down our thoughts, but if we do, we'd better read them, because someone may quote them. To know what we think, to think what we know, and to act out of our thoughts and our spirit. To live a life as best we can live it. This morning we are not Avatar, this is not Pandora. There are not clones living our lives for us. We're living our own lives. This morning we are invited to take some time to look at what we do and why we do it. Let us explore our motives, reflect upon patterns that define us. But let it be noted that there are levels of living and they rotate, much like a merry-go-round or a carousel. It's more of a cycle, life is, than a straight line. What goes around comes around, even if we're Methodists, and we're moving on to perfection, we're also moving away from it and back again toward it.

The unexamined life is not worth living. On one level, we sing lullabies to our children because we love them and we want them to go to sleep. We do what we do for the people we love. It's commitment to them, and is it important? Bill Coffin says, "Socrates is wrong. It is not the unexamined life that isn't worth living, it's the uncommitted life that isn't worth living." We do what we do because it's necessary. Just ask Chris Greenslade about commitment to what he loves. He was in the earthquake, Christchurch, New Zealand. Buildings fell. The situation, dangerous. He came onto the scene. They told him to step away, it was dangerous. He didn't, he wouldn't, because he got a text message from Emma Howard on this telephone. It said, "It's Emma here. I'm okay. I love you very much." It was this tangled pile of metal beams and concrete and a roof that pancaked at a 45-degree angle. The office tower was destroyed. Emma Howard was trapped inside six hours in a tiny cavity between collapsed floors. Chris dug. He pulled others free. He helped direct the rescue efforts. He found her. Tuesday she was in the rubble six hours. Friday, Emma and Chris Greenslade were married, and there's a picture of the two of them at their wedding. It's a picture of commitment. It's a picture of what you do for the people you love.

A young couple expecting their first baby read and studied everything they could get their hands on about babies, and after the baby was born they were looking through their books to find an answer to their child's constant crying. He wouldn't stop. They couldn't get him to stop, and so in absolute desperation they called an older friend, seeking sage advice. She was a grandmother. Her advice was wise. She said, "Put down the books. Pick up the baby." We do what we do because we love whom we love. Put down the books. Pick up the baby.

I knew a man and woman who took a job in Nebraska, moving from Colorado. They didn't want to move, but they did, because it was important. The job they had was to get their sons through college. Now they've moved back. They live in Longmont. They never complained about it, because they thought it was the right thing to do. I know a grandmother who said, "I thought I'd finished raising children, but with my daughter and my son-in-law, both of them working, I decided to help with the grandchildren. I really didn't mind it. But this isn't what I thought my life would be at this stage." Brian Bauknight, one of the great preachers in our denomination, Methodist church in Pittsburgh, Brian wondered what would happen after the retired. He noticed nobody called him. He noticed the church went on without him. His son and daughter-in-law wanted to buy a farm and they needed help with the kids so Brian and his wife, they co-signed the loan and they live in the farmhouse. So now it is the case that Brian Bauknight does not spend Saturdays and weeks working on sermons. He spends his time milking cows and slopping pigs and he's having the time of his life. Living in the farmhouse, taking care of the grandkids.

There was a time when David was a shepherd, sitting on the hillside, watching sheep graze. And I like to think he wrote the Psalm we heard this morning, and if he didn't, he could have. "O Lord, my heart is not lifted up and my eyes are not raised too high. I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me, but I have calmed and

quieted my soul. There was a time when the Zebedee brothers ran a fishing company with their father. And there was a time when a man named Paul made and sold tents. They called him Saul at the time. Paid good money, got to travel a lot, but he did what he did so he could support his mother in her old age. There was the time when Sarah was content to live out her days as Abraham's wife, and there was a time when Jacob worked for Laban and Leah, and Rachel, his wife, committed to do it for them. It's the right thing to do. Life falls into place. We sing lullabies to our children to put them to sleep at night.

A child, a boy, explaining what he thought about what was happening after his first experience on an elevator. He said, "It's a little room. You get in, you shut the door, you push the button, and the upstairs comes down." That is what commitment does. You step in where you think you should, you do what you're told, and the upstairs come down. And life leads where it's supposed to lead. Commitment to those we love. You know, there comes a time in life when we have a song and we've got to sing it. There comes a time when you do what you're compelled to do, and you do it for yourself. You get hold of something. It's your song, and you do what you love, and you are compelled to do it.

Matt Daley is a pitcher. He pitches for the Colorado Rockies. He's in spring training now, in Scottsdale, Arizona. He runs a lot. He throws a baseball until his arm is tired. He works really hard, but something he has hold of is a symbol of all of it for him, because he does what he loves. And there is a piece of cardboard that he holds in his hand. It's worth 99 cents. You can get one for less than a dollar. It's his own Topps baseball card. People will send it, and he'll sign it and send it back. It's his card, Matt Daley. "It's been my dream since I was two years old to have my own bubble gum card. Now I have it," he said. He's compelled to play baseball. It's a dream he's living. And so we do what we love. They may pay us. They may not. It doesn't matter.

Jacob wrestled with something from night until morning, and he had hold of something he wouldn't let go. And we get hold of something. We do what we love. We tap into our passion. There are men in the church who build model trains and little villages and little cars and trucks and airplanes. There's one man who has a train that goes outside into his garden, and then it goes back into the basement of his house. I know a woman who loves to raise orchids, little parasitic plants, and she paints them on china. I know someone who loves to collect frog statues. Some of the are glass, some are marble and rock, she has all these frogs. She even has a Christmas ornament that's a frog, and there's a frog in the front of her house as you walk by. It's a wooden frog. It's all about frogs. It's dogs for some, it's cats for some.

I knew a seminary professor who collected Studebakers. Actually, he taught worship. That's ironic. The Studebaker is a car that didn't sell because it looked weird. The front end of a Studebaker looked like the back end of a Studebaker. The reason I know that is, my father had one of them. You could not tell whether you were coming or going in a Studebaker. Sometimes we get hold of something, and we do what we love, and we are compelled by it.

What's going on in the Middle East these days? Is it something that we can understand from our history? The French Revolution, the American Revolution, freedom isn't free, but freedom is contagious. Was it a queen named Marie Antoinette who wanted people who had no bread to eat cake, that showed how out of touch royalty was, that led, in France, Rousseau, to revolution, Thomas Paine to write *Common Sense*, and someone to say "Give me liberty or give me death" and someone to say, "I regret that I have but one life to give for my country"? What began in France came across the ocean as the French Revolution moved toward a democracy that put out their king and queen, and the American Revolution turned away from the king of England. Freedom is contagious Is that what we're seeing in Egypt, in Freedom Square, Mubarak didn't get it. In Iran, in Libya, Kadafi isn't hearing it. The people have hold of something, and they will keep onto it if it isn't hijacked by religious fanatics. It's more precious than life, and they will give their lives to it, and they will hold on through the night, hold tight, it's freedom's song.

Harriet Tubman, a black woman, she had been a slave herself. She participated in what was called the Underground Railroad, where they took people from the South and slavery and got them through up into Canada. She is called the Moses of her people. She said, "I have freed a thousand slaves, but I could have freed a thousand more, if they knew they were slaves." In our world today, more and more people are no longer willing to be slaves. We are compelled to be free. We have hold of something. We do what we love. It's a song. We sing it. It's liberating. Free to be, free to be what we are, to do what we love. We are free. We are free. We find the passion. Is it music? Art? Dance? Speech?

Our youth last night. If you were here last night, oh my goodness. If you weren't here, let me tell you. They did such a miraculous, incredible, beautiful job with their dinner theater. The food was great. The service was wonderful. You know, I didn't even leave a tip. Anybody want's to leave a tip for those kids, just put it right up here and we'll see that they get it. It was a wonderful evening. The poise, the confidence of those kids, they did what they love. And those of us who were here, we loved how they did it. So we sing our song, and we do live the live God gives us, and we will reach our limit, our potential. It's a passion. It's compelling. We do what we love. It's the freedom song.

As we do what we must. Commitment to those we love. As we do what we love, compelled to express. But you know, there comes a time in life when we love what we do, and it isn't about just doing for others, it isn't just about us. Something gets hold of us and we're transformed like Jacob. We hold on, and we realize it's holding onto us. And we get our name, like Jacob, now Israel. We make a name for ourselves. We're transformed. We sing God's song.

Leonard Sweet writes, "I begin every day with what I call the Bugs Bunny ritual. You know, Bugs Bunny the rabbit, he chews on a carrot and he asks, "What's up, doc?" I get up in the morning, I drink my coffee, and I ask, "What's up, God?" It happens, not often, but it happens. Our life becomes a song. Something has hold of us, and we are consecrated and transformed and converted and we live for the love of it. We love what we do.

Church secretary, she answers the phone, she says, "Jesus loves you. This is Alice, how can I help you?" Alice would answer the phone, "Jesus loves you. This is Alice, how can I help you?" One day in a deep conversation with the pastor, probably over one of his misspelled words, the phone rings and she picks it up and she says, "Alice loves you. This is Jesus speaking, how can I help you?" and the voice of the caller responds reverently, "I thought your voice would sound a little different." Next Sunday is Women's Ministry Sunday. The voice of God could sound different than a lot of us think. It's conversion, it's transformation. Something has hold of us. We love what we do.

Jacob wrestled with God and God had hold of him, and "Give me your blessing. What is my name?" It would not let go, it would not turn loose. It's loving what we do. It's being blessed. It's transforming. It's conversion. This Love in Action program is an incredible program. We thought it would be good for the church, helping people helping people, doing what is needed. We had absolutely no idea. It's so much more than we thought. When you hear the stories. Read them in that insert. One person saying, "I was delighted to be of service, but I didn't count on the friendship that grew. The young woman I visited, we hit it off," she said. She is such a joy. I thought I might have added some support to her life." None of us can do everything, but each of us can do something. Another one who said, "I was asked to take her to her doctor appointment, and on the way back we talked and we talked and we talked. Sometimes I would intentionally drive slower or go around the block so we could talk a little longer. I was blessed to help her on one of her last days on earth." Another one said, "I spent several hours in the spring weeding and trimming her yard. She was so appreciative, she wanted to meet my wife. We sat on the porch. We drank ice tea, the three of us, and talked." Another one said, "Our little bake sale to help my son grew to the point that it involved the whole church."

It's easy to be useful, and it's fun. God amazes us over and over again. Some of the tasks were small and some of them were large, and hard. But it was more than raking leaves, baking cookies, transportation to a doctor. It's a chance to serve. An answer to prayer. It's when we become the prayer that's answered. It's when someone sees something in us we never saw in ourselves, to the point that we become what they see. It's doing what we do for the love of it. It's conversion, it's transformation, and all at once the world doesn't seem so dark. There is some light. And all at once the winter doesn't seem so cold. There's human warmth going on. There are times in life when we do what is needed. We sing a lullaby. It's for the people we love. There are times in life when we do what we love, and we do it for ourselves. It's personal, and we hold onto something and we don't let go. We sing our song. And there are times in our lives when we know something has hold of us, probably God, and we love what we do and it won't let us go. It's conversion, it's transforming, and we live the song, adding our music to the harmony. Commitment to those we love. Compellingly personal. Conversion and God and the phone rings. "Hello?" "I love you. This is Jesus speaking. Do you have a song? How can I help you sing it?" Let us pray.

O God, help us put love into action. May we find how we are living out your will and your way. Amen.

