

**Psalm 112:1-9**

Praise the Lord!

Happy are those who fear the Lord, who greatly delight in his commandments.

Their descendants will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed.

Wealth and riches are in their houses, and their righteousness endures for ever.

They rise in the darkness as a light for the upright; they are gracious, merciful, and righteous.

It is well with those who deal generously and lend, who conduct their affairs with justice.

For the righteous will never be moved; they will be remembered for ever.

They are not afraid of evil tidings; their hearts are firm, secure in the Lord.

Their hearts are steady, they will not be afraid; in the end they will look in triumph on their foes.

They have distributed freely, they have given to the poor; their righteousness endures for ever; their horn is exalted in honour.

**“Secretariat—It’s Not Just A Horse”****Rev. Charles Schuster****February 6, 2011**

Preachers will talk to anybody, that's why we're preachers. Fred Craddick, who taught preachers how to preach, even talks to dogs. You've heard this story before, because I've told it. Others may have as well. I love this story. It's about the racing dog, a greyhound, and those dogs, when they quit racing, they're destroyed unless somebody adopts them. I think there are members of our church who have adopted greyhounds. Fred was in a home where they had an adopted racing dog, it was a big spotted greyhound, he was lying there in the den, and Fred was visiting with the family, then they all kind of left, so he found himself alone with the dog, and they spoke. Fred said to the dog, "Are you still racing?" "No, I don't race an more." Fred said to the dog, "Well, do you miss the excitement of the track?" "No," said the dog. "Well, what was the matter, did you get too old to race?" and the dog said, "No, I still had some race in me." "Well, what then, you didn't win?" "No, I won over a million dollars for my owner." "Well, what was it, bad treatment?" "No, they treated us like royalty when we were racing." "Did you get injured?" "No." "Well then, why?" "I quit." "You quit?" "Yes, I quit." "Why did you quit?" And Fred looked at the dog and the dog said, "All that running and running and running, and what was I chasing? It wasn't even real."

It reminds me of the epitaph on a tomb that read, "She died of things." Tombstone next to that read, "He died providing things for her." You can die of things, and you can die providing things, and you can live chasing something that isn't real, but that's not really life. And so this morning, I want to talk about Secretariat, I want to have a conversation with a horse. Well, if I could. This horse won the triple crown, considered by many to be the greatest horse ever to run, the fastest. This morning that horse, in its own way, can tell us what the greyhound learned, all that running and running and running and it isn't even real. What are we chasing, it isn't real? What is real? That horse might know. That horse that ran with somebody on its back, kicking it and urging it on. Secretariat isn't just a

horse, it's an exploration into what is real. Let me suggest what is real. I think, first of all, do you think this is right? You do what you can, and you have to find the courage to do it, and that's real. You do what you can because you can.

Someone asked Coretta Scott King how she kept on going with all the trouble, you know, after Martin was killed. She said, "I was in Antioch College, I heard this quotation, I never forgot it. It said, 'Don't be ashamed to die until you've done something that is a victory for humanity.' Horace Mann said that. Coretta Scott King just did it. Someone asked Carl Lewis, after he won the gold medal in the 1984 Olympics, how long did it take to develop the skill and the speed to do what he did, and he said, "The day I stopped crawling, I took up running." We just do it. We do it because we can. That doesn't mean it's easy.

You know, around this church over the years, we've had young clergy right out of seminary. They come here and we older clergy are always giving them advice, and they take it in. They're like sponges. Do you remember we had Pam Everhart right out of seminary, Joel Kershaw right out of seminary, before the two of them... Don Bird, you had him right out of seminary, now we've got Meg Ryan not quite right out of seminary. Lynn and David and Rebecca and Ray and I are fountains of wisdom. We tell them important things, like, if you have a baptism, put water in the font, but if you forget, go ahead and baptize the baby dry, because only you and the baby know that, and the babies don't generally talk. Good advice. And if you're going to be critical of a bishop in a sermon, look around and be sure the bishop's not there. Good advice.

I could tell this as if it happened here. It didn't, but it could have. A young minister about to perform a first wedding asked one of the veterans, "Give me some advice." The old minister looked at the young one and said, "Well listen. It could happen to you. You may get in the middle of the ceremony and your mind could go blank and you wouldn't know what to say. If that ever happens to you at a wedding or a funeral or any other thing, just quote Scripture. It always works." First wedding, the pastor did a great job. The wedding was spectacular. But then came the time to pronounce them husband and wife, and his mind, I mean, it happens, it just went blank. And so he remembered the advice. He walked over to the pulpit, picked up the big pulpit Bible. It was open, it was open to Luke, Chapter 23, Verse 34, which I'm sure you all know what that says. Because, can you imagine the end of a wedding ceremony, when the preacher makes the pronouncement, and everyone is listening, and the bride and groom are leaning forward, and the preacher says, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do."

But I have to tell you, that is the most accurate statement that could ever be made at any wedding, because they don't know what they're doing. None of us ever knew what we were doing, but we do it because we can, and it takes courage. Secretariat heard his people say, "It's about life being ahead of us, and you run after it." You do it, because you can, and it takes courage. There's this legend in the Midrash, the people of Israel crossing the Red Sea, fresh out of slavery and afraid, the water raging in front of them, and the Egyptian army behind them. They couldn't go forward, they couldn't go back. Sandy Sasso tells the story: "And so there they were, at the water's edge, arguing about what to

do next, when Naashon a young man from the tribe of Judah, walked into the water. It was said that it was not until the water hit his nose that the sea split. And Moses heard God say, "Go forward, Moses." And Moses heard God say, "I will be with you, but don't depend upon me for a miracle. To believe in me is to act without fear, as if everything depends on you, because it does."

Courage is real. It's doing what we can, but it isn't easy. You just do it. Jesus often spoke of the narrow road that is the most difficult. The gate is narrow, the way is hard that leads to life, and those are few who find it. The road to Jerusalem at the end was the arrest. The road to Golgotha, the end was the cross. The road to Caesarea Philippi, at the end you meet the risen Christ and on the road to Emmaus and you are blinded by the light until you see some deeper truth. You do what you can because you know life is ahead of us, and you run after it, and that is real, so real. To believe in God is to act without fear, as if everything depends upon us. Because it does. Courage, just do it.

The horse knew that, but Secretariat's more than a horse. When Penny Chenery-Tweedy first saw the big red colt, she writes in her diary one word that day, and that one word was "Wow." They said the horse was too lazy, they said it ate too much, they said it posed for pictures, they said it would never win a long race because it was built for speed. But then there was this dream, and the long race was the Belmont, and it won the long race, and won it the fastest time that was ever run. It beat Sham, the next horse, by 31 lengths, because Wow. We've got to have a dream, just dream it, because we must. Dreams are real, very real. We dreamed because we're dreamers. We've got to have a dream because that's who we are. Because if we don't have a dream, we will lapse into what Whitehead called the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. Paul the Apostle calls us noisy gongs and clanging cymbals, and God told Isaiah that his people, who had no dream, had become stiff-necked.

Like the husband and wife on a trip, they got into a fight, nothing big, these fights are never about anything important. She may have said he drives too fast. He may have said "You put on a little weight." It could have been something that her mother said to him, or his mother said to her. You don't know. A big deal made out of a small matter. Neither one backed down. Heated argument, stone-cold silence. Nobody speaks. Passing a field, a farm kid trying to pull a mule across a narrow bridge. The mule brays and balks and won't budge. The mule was dug in. "Look at that old stubborn mule. Is that old mule a relative of yours?" he said. Not wise on his part. She looked at him and said, "Yes, as a matter of fact, it is. We're related. That mule's on my husband's side of the family." Stubborn, no dream. Gotta have a dream because we're dreamers, and if we're dreamers without a dream, we become scoffers without a cause.

DeWitt Jones, a photographer for National Geographic, Double Nickel got to see a short film that he made. He says, "If you walk up to a scene in nature and you've got your camera there and you don't think there's anything there, there won't be. But if you walk up to a scene with your camera and you think there's something there that I can fall in love with," is how he would say it, "then you will find it." And he went on to say, "God doesn't give us just one picture." Life is shot through with beauty, if you look, you can

see it everywhere. If we dream, we might make it true. Henry Ford once said, "Whether you dream you can do a thing or not, you're right." Tina Turner said, "I believe if you just stand up and go, life will open up for you." What we think we see is what is in sight. What we hope will happen often leads to what is becoming. It's the reason we pray. It's the basis for religion. To look at what is and to see what can be. To imagine the best, and to allow room for becoming. To dream because we are dreamers and we must.

Now, this is a very shallow, and I realize, analysis, but you know what I think is going on in Egypt? I think the president of Egypt was so concerned about safety and security, he forgot about freedom. I think he never got over the assassination of Anwar Sadat, and he was vice president, and he sat next to the president in the shooting when it started. We've got to have a dream of something better, or we will become victims of our dismal view of things. What did Jesus dream? What was he thinking? Was he thinking to take his faith into a new direction and build a church? I don't think so. Was he thinking to reform his own faith into something that was more like it should have been? I doubt it. I think his dream was larger than that. I think it was larger than the disciples knew. It was larger than the Pharisees feared. It's larger than we can understand, even. I think it wasn't about building a church, I think it wasn't about building up his image, I think it was about building a world where God and God's people can be together and people can live lives of meaning and hope.

My secretary is Judy Warren. Her husband Harold is the priest at St. Luke's Episcopal. Harold is retiring this summer, by the way. That's going to be a big loss, for that church and for all of us. His idea, it was his dream, it's in the parking lot at St. Luke's, you leave here and go see it. There's a place where you drive into that parking lot, and there's a sign up there that says "Enter." Then there's a place where you drive out of the parking lot, there's another sign that says "Go in peace." Every time you leave St. Luke's Episcopal Church, there's a dream, and we are reminded of it. We go in peace. We dream of peace. We dream because that's who we are. We dream because we must, otherwise we are reduced to the Chicken Little approach that the sky is falling. Well, it isn't. We dream. We have hope, and that is real.

We act on what we can, but it takes courage. We dream because we must. Otherwise we become cold-hearted and we will fail. And that is real. We may fail, but we try. We show up. We try, no matter what. Because we are tenacious. Ken Davis wrote a book. "I don't remember dropping the skunk, but I do remember trying to breathe." Not long after he and Diane were married, he saw her wedding ring lying on the bathroom sink, so he thought it would be fun to make her think that it was lost, so he hid it. That evening, she asked if he had seen her ring, and he said no. He kind of forgot about it. They went to bed that night. He was awakened by the sound of uncontrollable sobbing. "What's wrong?" He was half asleep. "What's wrong?" "Nothing." Tell you what, when your spouse wakes up in the middle of the night and tells you "Nothing," .... Now he was wide awake and finally she blurted out, "I've lost my wedding ring." "What a relief," he thought. Thinking she would hug him when she heard about it, he said to her, "I have your ring." The hug never came. "What?" "Yes, I took your ring. It was a joke. I know where it is, so you can go on back to sleep now." "It was dark," Ken writes, "so I didn't see her fist coming. But I

could feel it when it hit. In twenty years of marriage, that was the only time she hit me, and that was the last time I took her wedding ring." We try, we fail, we try, we lose, but we try.

And of course, there is what can be called the Charlie Brown complex. People like Lucy, who keep pulling the football away from us before we kick it. Also telling us, "You, Charlie Brown, you can't do anything right. You are a foul ball in the line drive of life. You are in the shadow of your own goalpost. You are a miscue. You are three putts on the 18<sup>th</sup> green. You are a 7-10 split on the 10<sup>th</sup> frame. You are a dropped rod and reel in the lake of life. You are a missed free throw. You are a shanked nine iron, a blocked punt, you are a called third strike." And we tell ourselves it's true, and yet there's Mother Theresa and others telling us God doesn't require us to succeed, only that we try.

Robert Capon said, "Original sin, do you know what original sin is? Original sin isn't making a mistake, even a bad one. And original sin is not thinking too much or too highly of ourselves. Original sin, you know, it isn't pride, it isn't failure. Original sin is that we would rather sulk than rejoin the party." The horse Secretariat knew before the race, he heard someone say, "I knew we won, simply because we were there and we didn't quit." See, winning is not about who gets the trophy, Steelers or Packers. Both those teams have won. Winning is about trying, that's all.

Paul Harvey tells about Tom Deal. He failed. In a softball game, he failed. He dropped a ball. It was an easy fly ball. Most of the members of our choir could have caught it. Not all of them. Tom Deal dropped it. That let in six runs. They lost. Tom Deal was a loser. They were out of the playoffs because of him. They called him Butterfingers. That was July 25<sup>th</sup>. The next day, early morning, ten month old baby Jennifer, third floor balcony got up right to the edge of the balcony. Baby sitter didn't see her. One leg over the railing, third floor. Second leg came. Tom saw it from across the parking lot. He ran over, tried to get somebody's attention. Nobody noticed. Jennifer, ten month old baby, fell three floor. He stood, Mr. Butterfingers, missed an easy pop fly the day before. Killed his team's chances for the playoffs, but on this day, Tom Deal made the catch of his life and saved a life. He tried, he failed, he showed up, he saved a life, and Mr. Butterfingers became Mr. Sure Grip.

The Psalmist says "Light arises from the darkness for the upright." When Jesus met with his friends, he gave them the broken bread and the cup. He told them to take it and he would be with them. He sent them out in the knowledge that they had to try to do with their lives what he couldn't do with his. And today we come to the table, and today we leave from the table, and we will fail sometimes, we will miss the mark, but if we do, we will try again, we will try again, we will try again because original sin is to sit around and sulk and not get back to the party. And that is real. The dog races around the track chasing something that isn't real, the horse trots around Churchill Downs with someone on his back. And if we know life is ahead of us, we will run after it, and if we have a dream and have hope, we will work till it comes true, and if we see ourselves as winners, simply because we got there, because we didn't quit, unlike the dog, unlike the horse, for

us at least, courage, hope, tenacity, we will not find ourselves running in circles. Let's drink to that, as we break bread together.