

### **1 Corinthians 9:16-23**

If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe betide me if I do not proclaim the gospel! For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission. What then is my reward? Just this: that in my proclamation I may make the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel.

For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that I might by any means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.

### **Isaiah 40:21-31**

Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to live in; who brings princes to naught, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing. Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows upon them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble. To whom then will you compare me, or who is my equal? says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and see: Who created these? He who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name; because he is great in strength, mighty in power, not one is missing. Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, 'My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God'? Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

**“Faith for the Fun of It”  
Rev. Charles Schuster  
February 8, 2009**

I didn't really have a chance to go over some of the events that are planned for the near future, and I would like to do that. The book sale continues in the library area until 1:30 today. In the Fellowship Hall you can sign up for a number of things, including the

Guatemala Mission Trip dinner, which is February 18, and next Saturday there's a Valentine dinner. Tickets are available, also Rev. Dalke will be speaking on the subject, "What Does Love Have to Do With It?" You can get those tickets in the Fellowship Hall this morning. Also we will go to a theater and observe the play *The Lobby Hero* and have a chance to interact with the director and the actors after the play. You can get tickets this morning, and you see the insert in the bulletin asking for your suggestions on the worship services. We do appreciate that Staff Parish Relations looks at that, the staff looks at that, and the Worship Committee takes a look at that, so that input is important to us, and there's a big box in the back of the sanctuary where you can put those, so fill those out and let us know what you think. And then finally, Double Nickel is this Friday, and the Stover Street Stompers, who led us in worship last Sunday, are giving them a concert Friday at noon.

In an effort to prune some books from the shelves of my office so that there might be space in that office to meet without threat of death due to an avalanche of books falling off the shelves, and also to add stock to the book sale for the library, I came upon a bulletin of the church in West Virginia that confirmed me, as a sixth-grader, on Palm Sunday one year in the Fifties. The bulletin from that church was there. Francis Asbury was sent from England by John Wesley to convert the colonists in 1780. If the British couldn't beat us with their guns, maybe Asbury could bring us to our knees with religion. And so in 1790, after the Revolution. Asbury started the church where I grew up, and in 1790 he actually spoke to those folks, and he referred to them as "lifeless and disorderly." Now, those are my relatives. Lifeless and disorderly. It made me think of the prophet Isaiah, the early part of Isaiah, where Isaiah the prophet's in the temple and hears God say "Whom shall we send, who will go for us?" Isaiah saying, "Here am I, send me." God then says, "Well, you can go, but let me tell you that they're not going to hear you because they're dull-witted." They must have been West Virginia Methodists. Calls to mind that passage in the Book of Revelation, in the church at Laodicia, "I know your work," the writer said, "You're neither hot nor cold, I wish you were one or the other. Because you're lukewarm, I'm going to spit you out of my mouth."

Lifeless, disorderly, dull-witted, neither hot nor cold. John Ruskin defined a sermon as thirty minutes to raise the dead and Colin Morris another British theologian said the average preacher, far from raising the dead, is well content if there is success at waking those who sleep. Ron Sleeth, who taught preaching at Iliff in Denver, once said he had a student who complained one Sunday a bird got loose and started flying around the sanctuary about the time his sermon began, must have startled the bird, and the congregation followed the bird all around the sanctuary, paid no attention to the preacher. And Ron Sleeth said, "I read that sermon, he brought it in to me, and frankly, the bird was probably the only thing that moved that day." I read this sermon to Kathy, my spouse, we're sitting there in the living room at the house, the dog's sitting there, and Kathy, and I'm reading this sermon, and she looks at me and she says, "It's dull." And I said to the dog, "Bite her on the ankles."

"Faith for the Fun of It". If it isn't fun, it isn't faith. Dull-witted people, lifeless and disorderly, neither hot nor cold, asleep in the pews, the sermons don't move and the

preachers are dull. If it isn't fun, it isn't faith, on one level, and Isaiah is telling us, "Have you not heard? Have you not seen?" Faith for the fun of it. I think that faith accomplishes two things, if it's doing what it ought to do, for us and to us. I think, first of all, it awakens us to participate in life. It awakens us. Faith for the fun of it calls for participation. To run and not be weary, to walk and not faint, Isaiah said, but woe to me if I do not preach the good news, Paul said. Woe to me if I don't tell people good news. One of my professors said, "You people have the easiest job in the world. Your job is to go out and tell people good news." Woe to me if I don't do it. Paul said, participate in the moment, be awakened to what's happening, rise to the occasion.

Allison MacKenzie is a preacher, and she's written some books, and she observed one day, "I'm driving down a highway, and the interstate was so devoid of scenery, I was actually excited to see a billboard." There are some of those highways between here and Denver, I think, and this billboard had a picture of Jesus, and he had long auburn hair and blue eyes, and written in big letters, a question, "Where will you spend eternity?" and someone had taken a spray paint can and drew a line through the question and had hand-painted another question over it that said, "How will you live today?" How will you spend eternity? How will you live today? Faith for the fun of it participates, rises to the occasion, lives in the here and now.

Robert Fulgham has always in his writing helped us to be able to live in the moment. He's written this book, *What on Earth Have I Done?* A realtor told him his house wouldn't get much money because it didn't have a good view and it wasn't located in a very good spot. "Why is that," he said. "Well, it's right across the street from a school where there's all that noise and traffic all day, and then it's five blocks away from a fire house, and then you've got that noise and traffic in the middle of the night, the sirens and everything. It's a bad location, you've got a bad view." Fulgham took a look at his view. The neighborhood had in it an ice cream parlor, a sports bar, a coffeehouse, a wine shop, a baker, a barber, a grocery store and a butcher stop, and he started thinking about the view and the location one morning as he was walking. He said to himself, "What I've got here is three hundred young neighbors committed to learning and drawing and dancing and writing and reading and math and history and then you've got their teachers, and their commitment. I see many of them coming in early and leaving late. And then he walked past the fire station, and he said, "I like hearing the fire truck as it roars by my house with the siren screaming in the middle of the night. It's the sound of safety." He sleeps better. "I sleep better knowing those firefighters are just five blocks away, protecting me. I feel like cheering them on, as they go by in their big red truck." And he thought about the appraiser's, realtor's evaluation of his house, and he said, "How can it be said I have a bad location? Daily I view humanity's finest instincts: the desire to learn and know and serve, and I get to see first-hand the commitment to look after each other, and the willingness to place oneself at risk, for the sake of the common good. The essence of civil society. My house is not for sale. I'm staying. Why? Because the location's perfect, because the view is priceless." Rise to the occasion. See what's in front of us. Participate in life.

There's a story about a woman who was given an award at the company banquet. As she came up on the stage to accept the award, she tripped and she dropped the trophy and it broke and it hit the presenter's toe, and as she bent down to pick up the pieces, she ripped her skirt. None of that would have been so bad, except the award was for the fact that she managed in her company the department that had the best safety record. And one other thing, that story's written in a book by C. W. Metcalf, and the book is entitled *Lighten Up*. It's a book about how we can see the absurdity in difficult situations, about learning to take ourselves lightly and take our work seriously, and about developing a more conscious sense of joy in being alive. Rise to the occasion. Participate.

Teddy is a fourteen-year-old cancer patient, and he told a group of kids at a hospice gathering, "I'm Teddy. I have cancer. I'm not cancer with Teddy attached. Most parts of you are healthy. I think when you forget to take care of the healthy parts and just keep working on the sick parts, you get sick faster. I have cancer. Cancer doesn't have me." Participate in life. Take what you have and faith for the fun of it. John Killinger has written a book, and all you need to know about the book is the title. Some books are like that. The title of the book is *For God's Sake, Be Human*.

Someone once asked the great philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, "Could you summarize reality in a sentence?" Professor Whitehead answered the question in one profound sentence. He paused, and said, "Reality. It matters. It has consequences." Rise to the occasion, because the occasion has consequences. It matters. Someone asked a group which included G. K. Chesterton a question: "If you were stranded on a desert island, and you got to have one book for your inspiration, what would the book be?" One person said, probably a preacher, one person said, "I'd have a Bible." Somebody else said, "Shakespeare's plays." Someone else said, "Milton's writings." Someone else said, "Emily Dickinson's poems." And finally Chesterton's turn came and he replied that he wouldn't have a Bible or Dickinson's poems, or Shakespeare, or any of that. He said, "I've got enough of that in my mind to inspire me, but the one book I would most desire in a situation such as that is a copy of *A Manual for Amateur Boatbuilders*." Faith for the fun of it. Those boy scouts and girl scouts, they know about that stuff. Rise to the occasion. Participate in the moment.

I don't think that's all faith does. I think that's part of it. I think the second thing that faith for the fun of it does, it gives us a sense of enjoyment in life. It prepares for the occasion to rise. It anticipates as well as participates. It anticipates surprises. Always surprises. The future. Isaiah said it – they're going to run, they're not going to be weary. They're going to walk and they're not going to faint. And they're going to mount up with wings like eagles. Always, always.