

## “Pressing On and Reaching Out”

A, Pentecost 18; 10:00 am

Philippians 3:4b-14; October 8, 2017

Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO

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*Holy Spirit may you be in my words and in the space between my words that all who are present here today might hear your word that dwells deep within each and every one of us. Amen*

### **I. ON THE JOURNEY TOGETHER—PAUL**

Paul was “on it!” He was on a journey, though sitting still—maybe even *shackled* in a cell—while writing this letter to the church at Philippi. Sometimes the most important and profound journeys we take happen, not with walking, running, moving down the road, but in a stirring in the soul—moving and growing *inside*. By never leaving home.

Paul makes leaps and bounds in just this passage—coming to the realization in a likely painful way, that he cannot rely on himself and his credentials alone to get through this thing called life. But that there is a higher road, a more excellent way. A better Source of insight than his own mind:

<sup>12-14</sup> I’m not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. Friends, don’t get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I’ve got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us Inward—to Jesus. I’m off and running, and I’m not turning back.

### **II. COMMUNAL AND PERSONAL BOTH**

We are “on it!” On a journey, with Paul, with ourselves—inside our own beings, and with each other in community. We began the journey back a month ago on September 5<sup>th</sup>, and we are discovering that being “on it” means many different things. For starters, when we reflect on our own personal journey as people of faith, we can’t help but also consider our journey together as a community of faith.

So we are exploring in ways individual and communal, in tandem, alongside one another. For we are relational beings—even the remotest hermit living on a mountaintop by himself is in relationship—with the animals, the birds, the sun and moon, trees and grass; dirt and rocks.

We have explored pilgrimage together—some of us traveling to many different places, and some right here in God’s country. We do that in this congregation all year long, of course. We embark in a different kind of season as well right now: The Season of Bazaar. The Season of preparing and making and creating and baking. Of welcoming our wider community into our hearth and home.

For this is a season in many ways of turning toward hearth and home—of settling in: putting in wood; putting up hay, putting up jam and pickles and applesauce. Of pausing long enough to enjoy the beautiful colors before they are gone in an instant.

As we traverse these seasons, in and out of them, we need to pause, also, and look around at our fellow journeyers and check in, catch up.

### **III. SAUNTER AND NOT HIKE?!**

John Muir, famous Scottish-American naturalist and author, had an interesting take on the topic of journeying:

Hiking—“I don’t like either the word or the thing. People ought to saunter in the mountains—not hike! Do you know the origin of that word ‘saunter?’ It’s a *beautiful* word.

Away back in the Middle Ages people used to go on pilgrimages to the Holy Land, and when people in the villages through which they passed asked where they were going, they would reply, “A la sainte terre,’ “To the Holy Land.’

And so they became known as sainte-terre-ers or saunterers. Now these mountains are our Holy Land, and we ought to saunter through them reverently, not ‘hike’ through them.”

I was a little startled when I read this quote the other day. What do mean, don’t hike, “John of the Mountains” as he was nicknamed. I personally *love* to hike! Just as fast and energetic as I can. To get the heart pumping, to move like the wind, to keep up with hiking partners who are in better shape, 2-legged and 4!

But, this caused me to pause and reflect, not just about physically moving down a trail, but on the spiritual journey of life. When do you saunter, and when do you hike? For I believe both are important, and life ebbs and flows between the two. In healthy ways, if we allow a balance.

For “To everything there is a season. And a time for every purpose under Heaven.”

When do *you* hike on the road of life, and when are you better off sauntering? “To the Holy Land.”

### **IV. WHEN SAUNTER AND WHEN HIKE?**

When we find ourselves going full speed ahead, and realize that we are leaving others in the dust—that hurt feelings and miscommunications are happening. When moving quickly means you miss the forest for the trees. Miss the feel of the sun on your face; the smell of the dirt and trees and flowers.

When we slow down and opt for a saunter over a hike, not needing to cram for the exam and live life at an all-out pace, we might find ourselves walking alongside a cherished person going a different speed than we are. By taking care-full time and connecting in a holy space, we might experience life moments that we will long treasure and are glad we didn’t miss.

The Celts understood this “ebb and flow”—of energy; of seasons. In this autumn season of shorter and cooler days, they turned inward to hearth and home,

kindled the flame around their shared life together. They read books around the fire, rested more—going to sleep and awaking with the light. They spent more time with loved ones. Sauntered.

## **V. ON TOWARD THE GOAL**

“Press on toward the goal”—Paul reminds us again. Whether you hike or saunter, or saunter or hike. Keep pressing on, for the journey is arduous but so worth it.

And what is the goal, we might ask Paul (and ourselves)? For you can’t go anywhere in life—alone or with a group—without *some* sense of where you’re going. Or at least what you’re all *trying* to get to.

And Paul answers:

The goal I pursue is the prize of God’s upward call in Christ Jesus. Reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. Where God is beckoning us Inward—to Jesus.

What does that look like for us, in our day? In our own calling?

A Qero Indian quote gives us a guide map:

### **Qero Indian quote:**

Looking behind, I am filled with Gratitude.  
Looking forward, I am filled with Vision.  
Looking upwards, I am filled with Strength.  
Looking inward, I discover peace.

Let’s unpack each of those a little as we look at our journey.

## **VI. LOOKING BACK WITH GRATITUDE**

“Looking back, I am filled with gratitude.”

It is so vital that we look at where we’ve been—as a community, and as a family living and relating together. Important never to lose sight of the past as we look to the future. And to give thanks! Over and over again. We bring what has been before *with* us; don’t leave anything behind that is life-giving, community-supporting, and “builds up the Body of Christ.”

Granted, there *are* things that need to be left behind, in order to keep moving forward on the journey. “Baggage” of various kinds—times we acted in ways that didn’t build up the body; instances where our words, actions or decisions hurt or wounded our fellow travelers.

But, we keep what matters. Celebrate the traditions. Honor the absolute core of who we are as a congregation. Ninety-one Bazaars is a perfect example!

## **VII. LOOK FORWARD, FILLED WITH VISION**

“Looking forward, I am filled with Vision”

Let’s be frank. We have experienced a lot of loss of varying kinds as a beloved community over the past

few years. Loss to the communion of saints across the veil. Loss to lower altitude and warmer climes. Loss of folks who have gone to be with other families and communities.

We **MUST** acknowledge that loss. Face that grief. Shed some tears; feel the shock, the hurt, the sadness, even the anger. Acknowledge the hole this has left in our hearts.

For grief that is frozen, stuffed down inside and not allowed to be expressed openly—of any kind—will keep us from looking forward, filled with vision.

When we are honest and get real about what's behind, only then can we look forward, filled with Vision.

## **VIII. LOOKING UPWARDS, FILLED WITH STRENGTH**

“Looking upwards, I am filled with Strength.”

Erin Gilmore, our guest preacher last Sunday, in her sermon on Philippians 2, reminded us that looking upwards is to seek the “mind of Christ.”

Philippians 2: “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.”

Erin: “Notice what Paul does *not* say – he does not try to help them figure out who is right, or tell them to form a

committee so they can figure out once and for all which side they are going uphold, he doesn't tell them to be of the same opinion, or the same class, or the same political party. He says if there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, and sharing of the Spirit, may my joy be complete be of the same mind, having the same love being in full accord and of one mind – the mind of Christ. The wisdom of Spirit.”

Looking upwards, I am filled with strength.

As we seek to have the mind of Christ, we keep looking up—to the high road. To the endless possibilities that lie before us like the vast expanse of the sky.

And, we find strength by looking upward and outward and pooling together our strengths, not looking down at our feet; looking only at what we lack and 3 feet in front of us. Look for our strengths.

Remember the words of wisdom from Angela Blanchard a community organizer in Houston? She works with all kinds of people who find themselves suddenly “shipwrecked.”

The important question to ask, at such a time, or any time people are in need and life is tumultuous, is not “what do you need?” But, “what do you have?” What do you bring with you, inside and out? What skills, knowledge, abilities do you have that can be pooled with what others bring? What can we do, if we all

pool our gifts and strengths together, especially in these challenging times?

IF we bind together as spirits and share our gifts and strengths and build on each other, rather than either tearing each other down or struggling along as isolated ships, we can not only get off the ground in flight, but begin to *soar*, as a community, on eagle's wings, with Christ as the head of the V.

### **IX. LOOKING WITHIN I DISCOVER PEACE**

“Looking within, I discover peace.”

How do you discover peace within? Within your own heart and mind, but also within the communal circle?

For, life and circumstances at times seem anything *but* peaceful! This week saw yet another horrific scene of violence, right in our own country—wrought, not by outside forces, but from within our citizenry.

Church Budgets, possibly your own budget at home, uncertainty about jobs and school and the future—many scenarios are tough right now. National and natural disasters abound.

“Sure!” you might retort! It's all well and good to say, “Look within and find peace.” But I am not peaceful inside. Too much is happening outside.

Paul's encouraging word comes in the next chapter: Philippians 4:4

<sup>4</sup>Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! <sup>5</sup>Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup>Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

### **X. WHETHER WE SAUNTER OR HIKE, WALK IN THE SPIRIT**

Whether we saunter or whether we hike, we are not alone. We are guarded—in our hearts and minds.

“For God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power, and of love, and of wise discretion.”

“For God did not give us *a* spirit of fearfulness, but *of* power and love and *a* sound-mind.”

Will Bullock, son of Ruthann Schoeffield and Mike Bullock, was on the journey of a lifetime in Scotland recently.

He tackled some mountains and rock pinnacles that would make most of us cringe, but lived to tell about it. And to reflect at a deeper level on this profound trek:

“The scramble up Ben Nevis was one of the most psychologically challenging things I've done. I learned about my weaknesses immediately and how the mind is the strongest muscle. If you ever want to give up, or

feel you might slip and fall to a dangerous place, if you find yourself on a ledge with no rope, without anyone to care for you, just look inside and know that you are strong. I learned that you respect everything around you, every drop of dew and pebble on the route, but most of all I learned to trust without question, breathe, and enjoy the moment. Now, I am coming home.”

(Will Bullock)

Looking behind, I am filled with Gratitude.

Looking forward, I am filled with Vision.

Looking upwards, I am filled with Strength.

Looking inward, I discover peace.

#### CLOSING HYMN (insert)

When pain of the world surrounds us,  
with darkness and despair...

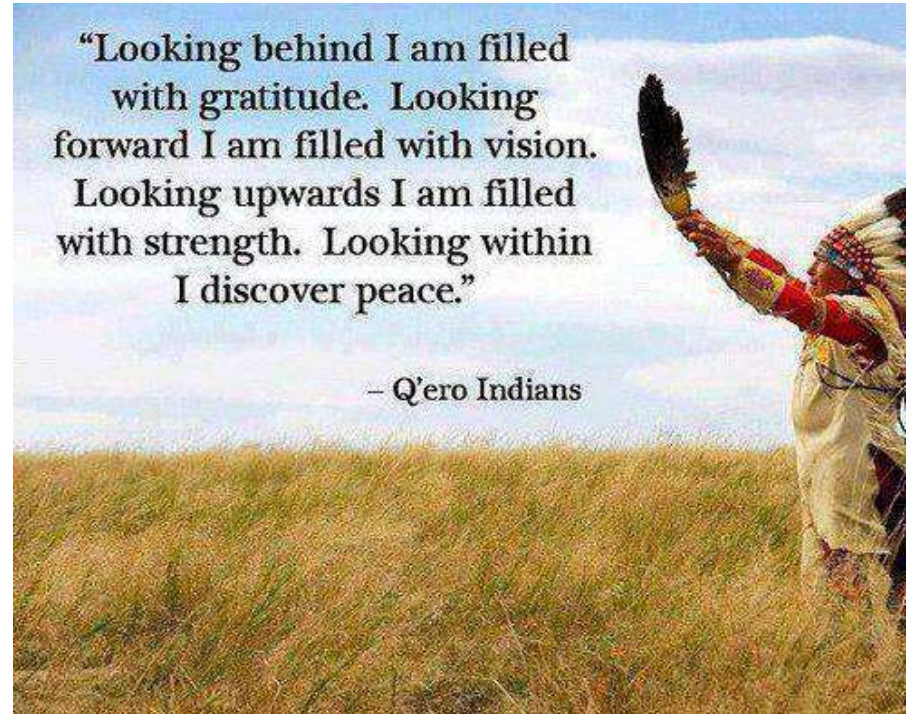
We are called to follow Jesus!

To put on the mind of Christ.

The spirit not of fear but of love and wise discretion.

Let us journey together in the Spirit, one in the bond of love.

Amen.



“Looking behind I am filled  
with gratitude. Looking  
forward I am filled with vision.  
Looking upwards I am filled  
with strength. Looking within  
I discover peace.”

– Q'ero Indians