

## ***“What am I doing with my life?”***

**August 24, 2008**

*Text: Romans 12:1-8, Matthew 16:13-20*

I.

***What am I doing with my life?*** What indeed?

As we wrestle with questions of *identity* today, questions of *life-purpose* and *meaning*, and the commitments we make along the way, I can't help thinking of all the Olympic athletes; there were apparently over 10,500 of them, around 600 from the United States.

With the closing ceremonies sometime today, I keep thinking of all the training and hard work these athletes put in to their preparation. And often times, for only a few seconds or minutes to perform and—at that moment—be at their best.

Some of them succeeded brilliantly, like Michael Phelps, of course, and Nastia Liukin and the phenomenal Usain Bolt. And there were countless others as well.

At the same time, some of them fell short with some unfortunate mishap of some sort—mistakes that kept them off the medal stand ... and left them crestfallen with disappointment.

But, you know, to me they are all winners and heroes. Because what the Olympic spirit is about is going for it. It's about aiming high ... pursuing your dreams ... giving it all you've got and then, hoping for the best. The Olympics are about putting it all out there.

That's all we can do. And we can't always win ...

1. and sometimes we cramp up in the last 80 meters of the 400 meter run ...
2. or hit the next-to-the-last hurdle in the 110 meter hurdles ...
3. or fall in our landing off the beam or the vault in gymnastics.

But still, when you're an Olympian, in any sport, and you've dedicated yourself and made all kinds of personal sacrifices to give yourself the best chance to perform at your best; not just for you, but also for your country ... and when, at last, your moment in the sun comes; however it turns out, you're a winner and you're a hero and you're worthy of admiration.

**What am I doing with my life?** For you Olympians, you're doing a lot and we salute you.

And of course, now, after the Olympic flame has burned out, many of them will have to figure out where to go from here. The next Olympics is four years away, in London. There are always other competitions and world championships ... but the ultimate stage

that the Olympics offers is four years away.

What to do? Years from now, how do I want to think back on my life? What do I want to think and feel ... about myself? And the decisions I've made?

## II.

Questions of identity are always important in life: I remember, growing up in the Midwest. As a child and youth, like many young boys, I dreamed of being an athlete. I didn't care what sport, really; I just loved sports.

And then in college, in my early years, I thought of being a child psychologist ... and later, as my awareness of the global community expanded and I was preparing to enter the **Peace Corps**, I thought I might want to be a civil rights lawyer. It wasn't until I was 25 that I began to feel the *tug* to go to seminary.

Again, questions of identity are important: **Who am I and who are you? *And what am I doing with my life?***

We wrestle with these questions don't we? And in our later years when our career path has been settled or we're retired, we wonder, still ...

- **What do we believe?** And what are we, still, committed to?
- And who are we going to vote for and why?
- And what does all of this mean for our children and grandchildren??

Questions of identity matter. We want to have a good feeling about the choices we've made in life ... about the path we've chosen to go down. And, more than anything, we want our lives to have meaning and purpose. Years down the road, we want our children to have good feelings about their childhood ... and to look upon us with love and admiration.

***What am I doing with my life?***

## III.

Over in Scotland, an ambitious young man was making his way through the countryside. Each time he came to a crossroads, he would toss a stick into the air. Whichever way the stick pointed when it came down was the way he would go. However, at one intersection, an older man saw him toss his stick into the air—not once, but three times—before continuing his journey.

Curious about this, the man asked him, *Son, why are you throwing your stick like that.*

Right away, the young man piped up: *I'm letting God direct my journey by tossing the stick and seeing which way it points.*

*Well then, why did you just throw it three times?* the man asked.

*Well, I had to,* the young man said, *the first two times God was pointing me in the wrong direction.*

Are we pointed in the *right* direction?

- Doing what we need to be doing with our lives?
- Making daily and weekly decisions that are keeping us on track? That are enabling us to realize our life-purpose and the purposes to which God calls us in Christ?

#### IV.

One of the things I like about our reading this morning from **Matthew 16** is the striking *humanity* of Jesus. How he's fully human, with real human feelings and emotions, like you and me. He, too, wonders about things; and, like us, there are things he has doubts about and nagging uncertainty over.

And so, one day, in a particularly introspective mood, perhaps, he asks the disciples:

***Who do people say that I am?***

While the disciples might have been caught *a little off guard* by Jesus' question, it's likely that they'd been thinking about it for some time. How could they *not* have wondered ...

Who is this man who quiets the storms and stills the sea? This man who heals the sick, gives sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf? This man who exudes such a contagious love and who speaks with such authority and power that everything around him is somehow changed? Who is he?

And apparently, without even talking it over, they respond:

- **Well, some say you're John the Baptist ...**
- **Others say you're Elijah or Jeremiah ... or perhaps some other prophet.**

While these answers are helpful, to some extent, they don't satisfy the recurring questions that keep rising up in Jesus' spirit. So, finally, getting to the point, Jesus asks:

***But who do YOU say that I am?***

In other words: not the world out there ... who only know me in a certain way; but, YOU ... you who have seen me and known me through the eyes of faith.

***Who do YOU say that I am?***

And of course, this is where PETER makes his famous declaration about Jesus:

**You are the MESSIAH, son of the living God.**

In Matthew's telling of this, Jesus seems pleased at this response and immediately blesses Peter, saying to him:

*And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church. And the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven.*  
And on and on ...

And thus does PETER become the *rock* for the future church.

V.

If I had to guess, I'd guess that Jesus struggled throughout his ministry with questions of identity. For even if he were the Messiah, what did it mean?

What is my life-purpose? Am I doing the *right* things? Making the *right* decisions?  
Doing what God would want me to do? **What am I doing with my life?**

When we think about our lives, how do we think?

1. Do we think in terms of earthly achievements and worldly measurements? Like material things ... and status symbols ... and retirement accounts??
2. Do we think about how we compare? To our peers ... our neighbors ... the people we know at work, at church, at the sports club or the Rotary Club, the Chamber of Commerce, the homeowners association or wherever it is??

In our reading from **Romans**, the Apostle Paul gets after us on this ... CHECK IT OUT!

***Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.***

That's a powerful statement. And for all of us, as Christians, that's it! That's what our lives are supposed to be about. About getting ourselves *right* with God first, about paying attention to our spiritual life so we have our basic, fundamental values sorted out.

With God, #ONE ... our family, #TWO ... and our career, #THREE.

Of course with God # ONE, everything else falls into place. That's a huge deal; and it makes all the difference. When God is # ONE, our values sort out in ways that honor God : in the choices we make for everything, in the priorities we set, in the way we see

our family and friends—people in general; in the way we view money and the way we spend it.

***What am I doing with my life?*** Am I doing what I need to do ... saying what I need to say ... being where I need to be ... making commitments I need to make?

## VI.

Look at it this way: if we've got ourselves *right* with God, in the BIG PICTURE of our lives, what can really go wrong?

Because when God is #ONE, we're making good choices—choices from the perspective of ***God's purposes***.

Why? And how? you might ask.

Because the Spirit guides us and undergirds us and nurtures us ... and gives us wisdom and insight along the way. All of which we need; because we're human ... and always, temptation to greed or pride or power gets in the way. Or maybe we just get lazy. And easily, we forget ... and we get off track.

***What am I doing with my life?***

When we're ***not conformed to this world***, as Paul exhorts us, and are everyday ***renewing our minds and spirits so we can DISCERN God's will—what is good, acceptable and perfect***, our lives tend to go well.

Because that's it! That's what we're supposed to be doing.

Keeping the BIG PICTURE of our lives in mind. Serving love's purposes ... living lives that overflow with compassion, forgiveness and generosity of spirit.

That's the Christian life ... the life to which God calls us in Christ. And when we live that life, we feel better ... we sleep better ... we work better ... we love better ... everything is better.

**All praise be unto God! Amen!**

Dr. Jeffrey E. Frantz  
Miami Lakes Congregational Church, *United Church of Christ*  
6701 Miami Lakeway South  
Miami Lakes, FL 33014  
On the web at [www.mlchurch.com](http://www.mlchurch.com)

