



## ***At Home Worship for Faith and Hope***

### ***Fourth Sunday after Epiphany***

February 7, 2021

\* Call to Worship

~ written by Joanna Harader

*We come to worship this morning from different places.*

***O God, do not be far from us.***

*We come to worship this morning for different reasons.*

***O God, do not be far from us.***

*We experience the presence of the Spirit in different ways.*

***O God, do not be far from us.***

*We hear Jesus' words with different ears.*

***O God, do not be far from us.***

*"Deny yourselves."*

***O God, do not be far from us.***

*"Take up your cross."*

***O God, do not be far from us.***

*"Follow me."*

***O God,***

***we thank you for drawing near to us***

***in this place,***

***in our lives.***

***Amen.***

*Either Sing/Read the Song Below or Listen to a Worship Song*

Opening Prayer

*Loving God, You call us to turn away from our own selfish interests, to take up our cross, and to follow after You—to find our lives by giving them up to Your greater purpose. So we come before You this morning with open hearts and open hands, eager to hear Your Word, and eager to know Your will. Through the power of Your Holy Spirit, move within us and among us as we worship. Open our eyes to Your presence; open our ears to Your call, open our hearts to one another. And then send us back out into the world, to live and work as Your faithful disciples. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and Lord, Amen.*

NO Children's Moments This Week

Share How You Can Present Your Offering to God

Make your offering personal...through a donation or an act of service...bring to God an offering of gratitude with grit! Lift up with thanksgiving to God for the ways He has helped you through these difficult days.

Sing the Doxology Together

*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; praise him, all creatures here below; praise him above, ye heavenly host; praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.*

Prayers of Confession

***Hear the Invitation of Jesus***

*A Time of Reflection and Prayer*

*If any of you want to be My follower,  
you must turn away from your selfish ways,  
from the things you think you want and need.  
You must pick up your cross and follow Me.  
If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it.  
But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.*

***What is it you need to turn away from  
in order to follow Jesus more closely?***

*(time of silent reflection)*

***Are there things you may need to give up  
in order to follow Jesus more closely?***

*(time of silent reflection)*

**What do you hear Jesus calling you to do?**

*(time of silent reflection)*

*Merciful God,*

*help us to turn away from things that do not lead to life--  
from attitudes and actions that get in the way of our relationship with You  
and distract us from hearing Your voice and doing Your will.*

*Open our eyes and ears to Your presence and Your call.  
Give us courage to take up our cross and follow where You lead,  
even if the path is uncertain or leads in unexpected directions.*

*For You alone are God, and we are Your people.*

*Take our lives, and use us to Your glory. Amen.*

The Lord's Prayer

*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.*

God's Word

Matthew 10:39; 16:24-28 (NLT)

*The Word of God for the people of God...Thanks be to God!*

Our Continuing Series on "Paradoxes"

Message

***"Cling to Life and Lose It; Lose Life to Find It"***

Pastor Clark

*...see below or go to website to listen online*

The Lord's Supper

See Liturgy at the End

\* Hymn of Faith

*"Take My Life, and Let It Be"*

UMH 399

Blessing

*"Faith That Carries the Cross"*

— written by John van de Laar

*It is too easy, God  
for faith to become an escape  
- a way to avoid the pain of being human and alive;  
or a path to success  
- a way to persuade the universe to give us the things we want;  
or a system of control  
- a way to bend others to our will*

*But the faith you offer is different, Jesus,*

*more dangerous and compelling;  
It's the faith that carries the cross,  
that embraces death  
and lays itself down for the sake of others;  
It's the only faith that can lead us to resurrection  
to life renewed and overflowing.  
We praise you for this faith, God,  
and open our hearts to receive it.  
Amen.*



## ***Cling to Life and Lose It; Lose Life to Find It***

Matthew 10:39

*"If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give up your life for me, you will find it."*

### ***Introduction***

A big chunk of this message is in the form of a modern-day story which is actually a contemporary retelling of a parable of Jesus from the pen of John Ortberg in his book ***When the Game Is Over, It All Goes Back in the Box***.

It's a story about a very committed man, very driven man, a guy that was willing to do whatever it takes to be a success and he discovered that it would take everything. He's a businessman, an entrepreneur, who's consumed by his work. He works 12-14 hours days, most weekends, joins professional organizations and boards of directors to expand his contacts. This guy knows how to network.

Even when he's not working, he finds his mind drifting towards work so that work becomes not just his occupation, but his preoccupation. Often his wife tries to slow him down, to remind him that he has a family and vaguely he's aware of the fact that his kids are growing up, but he's missing out. From time to time they complain about books they want him to read or games of catch they want him to play. But eventually after enough books not read and enough games not played they stop complaining, because they stop expecting. And he says to himself, that he'll become more available, that he'll have more time for the important people in his life in six months or so, ***"When things settle down."*** In fact, that's one of his favorite phrases, ***"When things settle down."***

And although he's a very bright guy, this man in Jesus' story, he never seems to notice the fact that ***things never seem to settle down***. "Anyway," he says to himself when he feels guilty, "I'm doing it all for them."

One night he wakes up at 1 o'clock in the morning and feels this twinge in his chest. And the next day his wife makes an appointment with the doctor and they actually tell him that he's had a slight heart attack and they warn him that all the symptoms are there for him to have another one, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and so he better make some changes in his life. And for a while he does. He starts working out at the health club, gets into an exercise program, stops eating red meat and junk food. But when the symptoms subside his motivation subsides as well. And he says to himself, "I don't have time to do all this stuff. I'll get around to it again ***when things settle down.***"

His wife tries to get him to go to church with her. And he intends to do it. But when Sunday morning rolls around he rolls over in bed because it's the only day of the week he gets to crash. And he says to

himself, “Besides I can believe without going to church. There will be time for that **when things settle down.**”

One day the comptroller of his company comes into his office and tells him “Business is booming so much that we can’t keep up with it all. This is our chance to catch the wave and if we do we’ll be set for life. But it’s going to take some major changes. We’ve got inventory headaches like you wouldn’t believe and demand is outstripping supply and our software is outdated and if we don’t restructure the whole company top to bottom it’ll be a disaster.”

And from that moment on this guy is like a man possessed, he shifts into overdrive. Every waking moment is devoted to this once in a lifetime opportunity. He’ll downsize the work force, put the company through a technological revolution, expand their Internet capability, offer 24/7 on-line service to all their clients. He’ll get his arms around this thing and he’ll make it work.

One night he goes home to his wife all excited and says, “You know what this means don’t you? We can finally relax. Our future will be secure. We’ll be set for life. Because I know the market. I’ve covered every base. I’ve anticipated every contingency. We’ll finally have financial security.” But she’d heard that tune before and learned not to get her hopes up.

That night at 11 o’clock she says, “I’m going up to bed. Do you want to come up with me?” And he says, “No. Not now. I’ll be up in a few minutes. I’ve got a little more work to do. But you go ahead.” At 3 o’clock in the morning she rolls over and finds herself alone in bed, he’s still not there and she says to herself, “This is ridiculous.” She goes down stairs to drag him up and finds him sitting at the kitchen table in front of his laptop with his head down resting on the table. And she says to herself, “I can’t believe this. He is totally out of control.” And she touches him on the shoulder to wake him up, but he doesn’t respond. Instead his skin is cold to her touch. And then she notices he’s not breathing. So she runs to the phone and dials 911. And in a few minutes the paramedics arrive, check him out, and tell her that he’s had a massive heart attack and he’s been dead for hours. She’s devastated.

His death is a major story in the financial community. His obituary is written up in *Business Week and Forbes* and the *Wall Street Journal*. And it’s too bad he was dead because he would have loved to have read what they wrote about him. And then they have a memorial service for him and because of his prominence in the community the place is packed. And they all file past his casket and say, “He looks so peaceful.” Rigor mortis has a way of doing that to a person.

People stand up to eulogize him at the service. “He’s one the leading entrepreneurs of our day,” one of them says. “He’s was an innovator in technology and delivery systems,” says another. “He was a man of principal, straight as an arrow. He’d never cheat on his taxes, his expense account or his wife,” says someone else. Another person says, “He had all kinds of civic achievements. He was a pillar in the community. He knew everybody. He was a networker.”

And then they all got together and had a memorial built for him and they wrote inspiring words on it. Words that they chose to summarize his life.

“Innovator. Entrepreneur. Leader. Visionary. Success. Pillar.” And they buried him, put up the memorial and went home.

But that night when it was dark and there was no one around to observe. Unseen, unheard came the angel of the God to that cemetery and made his way through all the graves until he reached the tomb of this man. And there, at that memorial, the angel traced with a finger the single word that God chose to summarize the meaning of this man’s life. And the word was F-O-O-L, fool. “You fool,” God says.

Why would God describe the man in this story as a fool, especially when everyone else thought so much of him? Did the angel pick the wrong tomb? No. Is God mistaken? No. Is God into name calling? No. Instead, God’s into truth and “fool” was an accurate diagnosis of this man’s life. For you see for all of his business smarts, for all of his ability to run cost/benefit analyses and cash flow projections he failed to account for one thing in his forecast. He failed to account for his own death. He forgot the possibility that somewhere along the line he might die.

And God stands amazed at the folly of a person who can meticulously prepare for every single contingency and cover the bases of every possibility and yet forgets the one inevitable certainty that stares all of us in the face from the moment we’re born and that’s the fact that one day we’re going to die. He failed to plan for the most obvious and predictable event of human existence. So what other word could God use to describe this man who was so busy making a living that he didn’t have time to make a life. “He’s a fool,” God says. And so is every person like him who lives under the illusion that this life is all there is.

Another take on this man’s life was his driven obsession with clinging to his life. He was driven to succeed. Driven to make a fortune that would give his family affluence and ease. He was driven to make a name for himself in the eyes of his circle of powerful friends. He was driven...so driven that he pushed God aside, pushed the important people in his life aside in the blind ambition to succeed.

Hear Jesus’ expanded word in the same gospel....Matthew 16:24-28:

*<sup>24</sup> Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. <sup>25</sup> **If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.** <sup>26</sup> **And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?** <sup>27</sup> For the Son of Man will come with his angels in the glory of his Father and will judge all people according to their deeds. <sup>28</sup> And I tell you the truth, some standing here right now will not die before they see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom.”*

This man gained the whole world but forfeited his own soul.

And in the process sacrificed and damaged the relationships of those nearest to him. Is anything worth more than your soul? More than the precious relationships with those nearest to you?

In the DNA of God's Kingdom, ironic as it sounds, clinging to life, grabbing hold and not letting go, is the toxic recipe for losing life. Precisely because it causes us to leave God out of the equation as the man in our story most definitely did. Such a way of life is blinding. Ironic as well because a person who meticulously prepared for every single contingency and covered the bases of every possibility and yet forgot the one inevitable certainty that stares all of us in the face from the moment we're born and that's the fact that one day we're going to die. He failed to plan for the most obvious and predictable event of human existence. ***This man was so busy making a living that he didn't have time to make a life.***

*"Christ died to save us, not from suffering, but from ourselves; not from injustice, far less from justice, but from being unjust. He died that we might live--but live as he lives, by dying as he died who died to himself that he might live unto God. If we do not die to ourselves, we cannot live to God, and he that does not live to God, is dead."* --George MacDonald

But that's only one side of this paradox. There is another...a more hopeful side. ***"But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it."***

What does it mean for you and me to give up our lives for Jesus? The context is helpful.

*"If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it."*

Jesus is calling us to so place our trust in Him, in the Life He alone can provide, that we let go of the false substitutes that this world offers. It seems so counterintuitive that it appears to be ridiculous at first. Our human nature is inclined to grab hold, cling to, strive to possess what is best for ourselves. Who would have thought that would be the most dangerous path? And a path with tragic consequences. On the other side of it, who would have thought that the safest and most fulfilling path would be to surrender our lives in complete and utter trust in the living God?

Story of Jim Elliot... ***"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose."***

What we may miss is the "gain" that is spoken of here. Most certainly it means the assurance of eternal life here, now and into all eternity. But it means even more. Listen to this reflection/prayer by Jan Richardson:

***The Blessing in the Round***  
*(inspired by Mark 8:35, Matthew 16:25)*

*For those who want to save their life will lose it,  
and those who lose their life for my sake,  
and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.*



*This blessing cannot help it;  
it's the way; it was designed.*

*Lay it down  
and it rises again.*

*Release it  
and it returns.*

*Give it away  
and it makes a path  
back to you.*

*There is no explaining how it delights in reappearing  
when you have ceased to hold it,  
no hiding the sly smile it wears  
when it shows up at your door,  
no mistaking the wonder  
when it circles back around  
just at the moment  
you thought you had  
spent it completely,  
had poured it out  
with abandon  
where you saw  
the deepest thirst for it,  
had put it entirely  
in the hands  
of those desperate  
in their hunger.  
But here it is,  
the perfect circle of it  
pressing into your hand  
that curls around it  
and then lets go,  
receiving  
and releasing  
and receiving again  
like the breath  
that does not belong to us  
but sets us in motion.*

***Now that's amazing!***

## **The Lord's Supper for Epiphany**

*The Lord be with you.*

**And also with you.**

*Lift up your hearts.*

**We lift them up to the Lord.**

*Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.*

**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

*It is right, and a good and joyful thing,*

*always and everywhere to give thanks to you,*

*Father Almighty (almighty God), creator of heaven and earth.*

*Before the mountains were brought forth, or you had formed the earth,  
from everlasting to everlasting, you alone are God.*

*You created light out of darkness and brought forth life on the earth.*

*You formed us in your image and breathed into us the breath of life.*

*When we turned away, and our love failed, your love remained steadfast.*

*You delivered us from captivity, made covenant to be our sovereign God,  
and spoke to us through your prophets.*

*And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven  
we praise your name and join their unending hymn:*

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,**

**heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.**

**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.**

*Holy are you, and blessed is your Son Jesus Christ,*

*in whom you have revealed yourself, our light and our salvation.*

*You sent a star to guide wise men to where the Christ was born;*

*and in your signs and witnesses, in every age and through all the world,  
you have led your people from far places to his light.*

*By the baptism of his suffering, death, and resurrection*

*you gave birth to your Church, delivered us from slavery to sin and death,  
and made with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit.*

*On the night in which he gave himself up for us, he took bread,*

*gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said:*

*"Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you.  
Do this in remembrance of me."*

*When the supper was over he took the cup,  
gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said:  
"Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant,  
poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.  
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."*

*And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ,  
we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving  
as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us,  
as we proclaim the mystery of faith.*

***Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.***

*Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here,  
and on these gifts of bread and wine.  
Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ,  
that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood.*

*By your Spirit make us one with Christ,  
one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world,  
until Christ comes in final victory, and we feast at his heavenly banquet.*

*Through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy Church,  
all honor and glory is yours, almighty Father, now and forever.*

***Amen.***

## ***I Love to Tell the Story***

*1. I love to tell the story  
of unseen things above,  
of Jesus and his glory,  
of Jesus and his love.  
I love to tell the story,  
because I know 'tis true;  
it satisfies my longings  
as nothing else can do.*

*Refrain:*

*I love to tell the story,  
'twill be my theme in glory,  
to tell the old, old story  
of Jesus and his love.*

*2. I love to tell the story;  
more wonderful it seems  
than all the golden fancies  
of all our golden dreams.  
I love to tell the story,  
it did so much for me;  
and that is just the reason  
I tell it now to thee. [Refrain]*

*3. I love to tell the story;  
'tis pleasant to repeat  
what seems, each time I tell it,  
more wonderfully sweet.  
I love to tell the story,  
for some have never heard  
the message of salvation  
from God's own holy Word. [Refrain]*

*4. I love to tell the story,  
for those who know it best  
seem hungering and thirsting  
to hear it like the rest.  
And when, in scenes of glory,*

*I sing the new, new song,  
'twill be the old, old story  
that I have loved so long. [Refrain]*

***Take My Life and Let It Be***

*1. Take my life, and let it be  
consecrated, Lord, to thee.  
Take my moments and my days;  
let them flow in ceaseless praise.  
Take my hands, and let them move  
at the impulse of thy love.  
Take my feet, and let them be  
swift and beautiful for thee.*

*2. Take my voice, and let me sing  
always, only, for my King.  
Take my lips, and let them be  
filled with messages from thee.  
Take my silver and my gold;  
not a mite would I withhold.  
Take my intellect, and use  
every power as thou shalt choose.*

*3. Take my will, and make it thine;  
it shall be no longer mine.  
Take my heart, it is thine own;  
it shall be thy royal throne.  
Take my love, my Lord, I pour  
at thy feet its treasure-store.  
Take myself, and I will be  
ever, only, all for thee.*