

## HOMILY 29<sup>TH</sup> SUN OT YRB 2018

What is the purpose of life? I think our culture would tell us that the purpose of life is to be happy. And I hear people say things like: “I just want my children to be happy; or I don’t need a lot of stuff, I just want to be happy.” I am going to suggest to you that chasing happiness makes people very unhappy. Happiness is all about me and all about feeling good in the moment, and that feeling will come and go. If the purpose of your life is to be happy, eventually you are going to step back and say: “Is that all there is?” I want to suggest to you today that the purpose of life is to find meaning and that involves serving a purpose beyond yourself, embracing the suffering that life brings, and redeeming that suffering.

In the Gospel reading today, James and John want Jesus to give them places of honor in heaven. This is about chasing happiness. It is all about them. Jesus tells them: “You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I drink?” Jesus is telling them that there is going to be some suffering involved, and they say yes, but they really do not know what they are saying. Jesus tells them if you want to be great, you have to serve others. You are going to have to follow my example. The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and give his life as ransom for many. Right before this Gospel passage, which we did not hear this morning, Jesus tells the disciples that he is going to be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the scribes, killed and in three days be raised. The disciples did not understand this, did not want to hear this, and so they ignored it. They did not want to hear about the suffering.

To find meaning in life you have to serve a purpose beyond yourself. That always involves serving other people. It may be your job, but for many people it is not. It may look like serving an institution, but if this is your purpose it is really about the people the institution is serving. The purpose is very personal to you. Your purpose is what gets you out of bed in the morning and enables you to go on living. Serving others is about putting their needs ahead of yours and to some degree always involves suffering. Finding meaning in life also involves embracing the suffering that comes with serving others and comes with life. And you have to redeem that suffering. Jesus life had great meaning. His purpose

beyond himself was to serve all humanity. And that involved suffering. He was rejected by many, he suffered terribly and he died. And he redeemed us. He rose from the dead.

We need to redeem the suffering in our lives. And we redeem the suffering by changing our story. You can change your story by retelling it to yourself or other people, but I am going to suggest to you that you change your story by retelling it with God in prayer. Let me give you a couple of examples. There was a man who was a star quarterback in college until he suffered a severe injury that ended his football career. His story at that time was: "I had a great life until an injury ended by football career and my life." A number of years later his story changed to: "My life did not amount to much during college. I was just drinking and partying a lot. When I was in rehab I met my future wife. I straightened out my life and we had two children. I found my purpose, to serve my family. My life is so much better now." An example from my own life. My life was going really well until my mother got really sick and died. It was so hard watching her suffer, and it was very painful when she died." Now my story is: "My mother died 17 years ago. I got to take care of her during the months that she was so sick. We spent a lot of time together during those months. I look back at the time as a very blessed time. I got to give her back some of what she gave me. And now, when I minister to people who have lost a loved one, I have a better idea of what they are experiencing because I have experienced a big loss." Jesus' story before the Resurrection it was: Jesus was rejected, suffered greatly and died on the cross, and it was all over. After the Resurrection his story changed to: "Jesus came to earth as one of us and showed us how to live and how to love. He showed us how to serve one another even when it involved great suffering. He rose from the dead and is with us loving unconditionally all the time." We have to redeem the suffering. We have to change our story. Sometimes it takes years, but God will help us.

So remember, the purpose of life is to find meaning. To do that you have to serve a purpose beyond yourself that is personal to you and always involves serving others. You need to find what gets you out of bed in the morning and allows you to continue living. You need to embrace the suffering and redeem the suffering with God by changing your story.