

To all the Saints at Manatee Life,

**SCRIPTURE:**

Ephesians 5:15-16 (NIV) – Larger reading: Ephesians 5:3-20

*"Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil."*

**STORY:**

Dorothy Whitney Straight, after the death of her husband, Willard Straight, wrote to Herbert Croly: "But just because he taught me to see life with new eyes, just because he liberated my spirit and brought me life and the abundance of it, now that he is gone I cannot feel that the meaning and joy of existence have gone, too. Had he given me less, I should find myself less equipped to meet life without him now. But having given me everything, I can still feel that life is the adventure that he revealed, the quest for reality that he enjoyed, the great enterprise in which he so vigorously and gallantly participated."

**OBSERVATION:**

Have you ever gotten lost on the way to your life? We all have ... some more so than others. I'm not really sure when it begins, but we get sidetracked from being our authentic self by getting buried by artificial identities. We just get lost. It is so easy. First comes the question, "Are you Ted's sister or Mary's brother?" which is followed rather quickly by, "Are you Lowell's son or John's daughter?" We start getting lost on our way to our life so much so that we get confused as to just who we are. Labels, if that is what they are called, come quickly and have a tendency to stick ... if we like it or not.

Maybe that's why I love the story shared above because Mrs. Straight was stating that she was not losing her life simply because her husband of many years had died. Too many widows or widowers live into the reality that existence goes on, but real living has ended because their partner in life is gone. Or, under different circumstances, the children that they have dedicated their life to, shaped their life around, raised them to maturity are moving on with their life leaving the nest empty. Dorothy Whitney Straight found her own identity in the midst of the adventure.

The national media presents us with other stories such as, Tiger Woods losing his moral bearings and his core structure by believing that he was indestructible; Lindsay Lohan gained her fame and fortune, but lost the authentic individual; Jerry Falwell, Jr. found fame (*sort of*) by who his daddy was, but began to compromise his moral standards and has fallen from grace. There is a much longer list of famous and no so famous individuals who simply got lost on their way to living their life. These individuals got caught up in believing what others were saying about them. They lost sight of what was really important and on their way to their life got lost.

Some people never recover from this emotional, mental, and spiritual misstep. They simply keep going through the same process expecting different results. Examples can

be found wherever you wish to look – multiple divorces followed by multiple re-marriages, constantly changing jobs or the more “normal” sign of “lostness” by stating what your job is before people ask or who your parents are or who your children are long before anybody really cares.

It is all so confusing because as these layers are placed upon us we not only get buried by them, but we get lost on our way to our life. Mary Frances Chappell comes to mind. She very gently and lovingly refused to be labeled as, “The preacher’s wife” and gently shared, “I have a name!” Also, she didn’t let her children be labeled as the “preacher’s kids” ... they too had a name and an identity apart from who their daddy was and what he did.

The sad result in this loss is that we fail at the most fundamental requirement of life ... learning to love ourselves. It is sad because if we do not love ourselves then it becomes impossible to love anyone else. Oh, we say we love them, but the testimony to the reality that we really don’t love them as their authentic selves is that we place certain spoken or unspoken requirements upon them ... as in “you should do ...” or “why did you do ...” or “you must ... you gotta’ ... you ought ... you have to ... why haven’t you ... etc.” Just one layer of expectations and demands after another – layer upon layer – until at some point they get lost on their way to their life.

Such commentary, on the life of others, is often hidden. Pastors in particular hear it all the time. He/she is the Shepherd ... he/she shouldn’t be doing that ... saying that... writing that ... sharing that. The unintended consequences are that the authentic nature of the life of the pastor is being stolen... little by little ... comment by comment ... attitude by attitude. It is little wonder, as Coach McCartney, founder of Promise Keepers, discovered, “that about 95% of the men and women who are standing in the pulpits in America wish that they could do something else.” They have gotten lost on their way to their authentic life. It is a real challenge to post a guard at the doorway to the soul to keep from having our lives taken from us.

Oh, we’ve learned these little personality tricks from experts ... they are called our parents. And, in turn, we pass it down to our children ... “visiting the iniquity unto the third and fourth generations” (*to quote from the Ten Commandments*). We use these parental tricks in order to “control” the lives of the little people who have been entrusted into our care. Our intentions are good, but the process is misplaced. It is actually a miracle that they grow-up as well as they do, but the sad reality is that they, along with us, missed out on the authentic life that God intended us to have ... we simply get lost on the way to our life.

A child comes into this world trusting everyone in authority, but then through a little action here and a little “un-action” there the child soon, too soon, learns that it isn’t always good to trust ... or to love ... or to believe ... or to hope ... or to care ... layer upon layer and the life is lost ... but maybe not forever.

If we lose ourselves in love then possibly we make the discovery of the life that God has held out for us. From our experiences in life we become afraid to really love – it only leads to hurt or pain or heartache. If we do reach out in love it is normally to continue to feed our layered life and not to free us so we can embrace the life that we have lost on our journey.

Look deep within yourself ... discover the core of your being ... embrace it ... love it ... learn from it ... be honest with yourself ... and then free it to soar upon eagle's wings ... laugh, love, live ... and you just might discover the life that you lost on your journey to live.

**QUOTE:**

*The tragedy of life is not that it ends so soon, but that we wait so long to begin it.*

- Richard L. Evans

**PRAYER:**

You have to come in the person of Jesus the Christ. He came to give us life ... abundant life. Forgive us for allowing the agenda of others to get in the way of living the life that you have granted us. We need real help to start to live a life of victory. In the name of the life giver, Jesus Christ. Amen

And the faith journey continues, Pastor Jim

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***Worship Service will be posted on our Facebook account @ Manatee United Methodist Church Sunday morning. The sermon is: "Being Nearsighted" come join in the service.***

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