

June 19, 11 Father's Day 1 John 1:1-4

GOD'S PEOPLE WITH A PURPOSE

This week our church will be transformed into a new adventure for this week's VBS, Panda Mania. Hopefully we will have lots of kids who will come. Hopefully we will realize the purpose of this or any VBS program. Hopefully those who have volunteered to teach, help in games, tell the stories, prepare the snacks, do set up, tear down and what have you will realize the importance of this one week in a young child's life. Some parents think of these 2 hours as free babysitting while they catch up on things at home, do a little shopping, or relaxing without the kids around. But we, the church, should realize the importance of these nights we have with these kids, some who will pay attention, some who will be rowdy, and some who will cry for mom or dad. VBS is not just another program the church MUST do. VBS IS A TOOL TO TEACH KIDS ABOUT GOD, JESUS, and HOW TO GET ALONG and much more, like having fun. The purpose of VBS and Sunday school should be to make an impact on their lives, plant seeds of faith, and for some, to offer them to receive Christ as Savior. And yes, many do, and yes, some don't quite understand it. But there is always one or two who later when they grow up look back to a VBS program as a time they gave their heart to Jesus. So hopefully our staff this week will remember the purpose of this VBS, to show the love of Jesus to all people, and to teach them not only with our words, but our actions, what it means to follow Jesus. You see, often a teacher's faith will grow as they prepare lessons, listen to the stories, even watching that which is directed toward the young of age.

I guess that is why I love to be involved with VBS for it helps me to plant seeds of faith no matter if these kids belong to our church or go somewhere else. Their faith walk is just as important as any adult. Jesus says to let the children come to him because they too shall see the glory of his life and salvation. Our purpose is to show them Jesus, not the

United Methodist Church. But in saying that, if they are unchurched we welcome them to join us on a faith journey to eternal life.

At the end of the Apostle John's gospel we read some great words for us to ponder. When all else is said and done we learn the reason for the stories in the gospels, the ups, downs, struggles, the joy, the sadness, the truth, the rejections, the sufferings, the death, the illness stories and much more. That purpose is found in John 20:30 and 31.

³⁰ Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe^[b] that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Did you see it? The purpose of Scripture, all those miracles and everything else **is that you might believe and by believing you have life in Jesus name.** That's how important it is to tell the stories. That is why there is a hymn that says, "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 longing as nothing else can do." Part of the second verse goes like this..."I love to tell the story for it did so much for me, and that is just the reason I tell it now to thee." That is why I'm still in this pulpit. At times I feel like Billy Graham knowing there is one more lost soul to be found, one more seed of faith to be planted, one more person who needs to know that God loves them.

When you are struggling with life and you remember the stories from the Bible you find comfort. When I went to tell the president of the company I was leaving the company after 13 years and going off to college and entering the ministry, he told me when he traveled to various places he would often pull out the Bible from the night stand

and read some of the stories in the Old Testament and find comfort. You see, he was Jewish.

Since we don't always have the Bible at hand we need to learn the stories. Remember Adam and Eve, Moses and the plaques, Moses leading the people to the promise land. About the great flood and Noah's ark with the many animals. I bet some this past week thought they might need an ark. We remember Joseph and his many colored coat and the jealousy that brought among his brothers that led to him being sold into slavery. We remember how he rose to second in command and saved his people and the twelve tribes were formed in Egypt and later brought home by Moses. Or there is Daniel in the lion's den, or how about the Hebrew kids thrown into the fiery furnace. Remember the comfort of the 23 Psalm. Add in King David and his rise and fall and repentance, plus so much more. And that's just the Old Testament. Take note of the New Testament, Nicodemus' conversation with Jesus about 'being born again.' Or the stilling of the storms, the healing of the lepers and you find more stories that remind us of God's love and presence. He that can divide a river, bring water from a rock, who can make a spring that is sour to be sweet, fill people with the Holy Spirit, can raise the dead, heal the sick and lame, give sight and on and on. No wonder I love to tell the stories, because they are true and the God who worked miracles way back then still works miracles today. And I must say, many people still are hoping and praying looking for miracles to happen. Why? Because the God of yesterday is the God of today and the God of our tomorrows.

Sometimes people wonder why they are here on this earth. Some who get a little older sometimes ask the same question, why they are still here. I have no quick sure answer. I just know that when our homes are finished in heaven our invitation will be issued to join the heavenly Father. Until then, don't wonder why you are still here; just do

the best you can, while you are here. Do all the good you can do, and love God with all your heart, soul and mind. One day when you get to heaven you can ask God what took him so long to bring you home.

Rick Warren has written a couple books, *The Purpose Driven Life* and *the Purpose Driven Church*. When God created us in our mother's wombs He had a design in mind for each of our lives. At times it might be difficult to find just what that purpose is, but the over arching purpose is to know God and have a relationship with him and to be his witness. Rick Warren states, "You are not an accident, God had you in mind, and he planned you for his purpose. These purposes will expand far beyond the few years you will spend on earth. **You were made to last forever.**" So if someone ever asks why they were born you can tell them that God has a purpose for them and they can find that purpose through a relationship with him.

Today we turn to John's first letter written for it is filled with truths and excitement.
Let's read 1 John 1:1-4 together: (screen)

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched- this we proclaim concerning the Word of Life. The life appeared: we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete."

I picture an excited John when he picked up his pen and began to write about his relationship with Jesus. I picture a smile on his face, as the Holy Spirit reminds him of special things that transformed his life from a fisherman to a disciple and now a writer. I

can almost picture John singing in his mind, “If you’re happy and you know it clap your hands. If you’re happy and you know it stomp your feet. If you’re happy and you know it shouts ‘amen’. And if you are really, really happy do all three.” Yes, John was a kid at heart....after all he was a child of the King of Kings.

From his letter we see one purpose for our lives is having **fellowship** with each other. This fellowship is not just because we are friends but because we have something in common. We are believers in Jesus Christ. We share our faith with one another, and we do good things. I guess that is why John Wesley made this part of his covenant for his people when a new denomination began. He wanted those who belonged to his teachings to understand three things. They should do no harm...do good... and stay in love with God. Pretty simple stuff on the surface, but practicing it is another matter.

John shares with us his excitement and joy of knowing Jesus. He does that so that we too can feel the excitement of knowing Christ and having fellowship with him. It’s like he is saying to us, “Folks, I was there. I was there when he did many miracles. I was there when he stilled the storms. I was there when he healed so many. I was there when he called Lazarus from his grave after 4 days. Folks,” he would continue on, “I was there when we ate the last meal together and Judas left to betray him. I was in the garden when they came to arrest him. I was there at his trial holding up his mother. I was at the cross, the burial. I was the one who ran to the tomb when the women said it was empty. I was the one that looked in and remembered that Jesus said he would die and in 3 days, rise again. I was there when he appeared to us. I touched him. I heard his voice. I saw him with my own eyes. He is alive. Believe me. He is alive. Our faith lives on and he has given us a part of him through the Holy Spirit.”

You see, John wants our joy to be complete as is his, in knowing that Christ is with us always and teaching us his ways.

We Methodists are great for fellowship dinners. But it is more than the dinners; it's the get together with those of like mindedness. That is why when we have our fund raisers it's more than trying to make money. It's the fellowship that we share with one another. It's working together for a common good. It's getting to know one another. Worship is fellowshiping with one another and with God. It's breaking bread together and remembering the gift of life that God has offered each one. It's sharing our faith stories, and listening to God speaks to us and sometimes through us. It's singing hymns of praise, and applying those in our own situations. It's raising our hands in praise, thanking God for so many things, while saying God I need a miracle or two, will you help me.

What do the disciples have in common? They are all witnesses of Jesus. They can tell their stories. They can tell His story. They can share the memories and the teachings. They can share that when they were down, Jesus lifted them up. When they were in a bind he encouraged them. When they thought they were on sinking sand he reminded them to trust in the rock of their salvation. When they were in the storms he came to them.

What do God's people have in common? We have the same Lord of all, the one who died to set us free, the one who lives today and gives us guidance. He's not Baptist, or Lutheran, or Christian, or Roman Catholic, or even United Methodist, (though he might lean toward Methodism.) HE IS LORD! As the chorus goes, "He has risen from the grave and HE IS LORD! Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." Like the song says, we are the church together. The key element...believing in Jesus.

Another purpose for us is that we can be **joyful**. Jesus didn't rise again to see frowns on our faces. In the Upper Room that first time he turned sad faces into happy faces when they knew he was alive. They jumped with joy once they realized it wasn't a ghost before them, but the true living risen Christ. When Pentecost came and they were driven into the streets to share the message it was with joy that they told the story that saved over 3,000

people. When the two Emmaus disciples traveled with Jesus they were sad because Jesus had died. That is what they told the ‘stranger’ who made the journey with them. But their hearts were strangely warmed at the table when Jesus broke the bread, gave thanks and gave it to them. The blinders came off and they realized Jesus had been with them all the while. They were so filled with joy that they ran back to find the disciples to tell them they saw the risen Jesus. Don’t you think on the way back every person they passed would have heard the joyful men shout Jesus was alive? I think so.

Some people think, incorrectly I might add, that Christians are no fun or have no fun. That’s wrong. We don’t have to use some of that other stuff to bring joy and fun into our lives. We have Jesus. Some might think worship has to be dull or that sermons are so boring they almost put you to sleep. Wrong! God’s word spoken is not boring. It’s his story lived through lives of regular people. Our joy is in being a follower of Christ. Our joy is knowing that he lives and he will never leave us. Our joy is knowing that our team is stronger than the devils team. Our joy is knowing the battle has already been won. Our joy is knowing that this life is not the end, but that there is a place for all believers around the table of grace in heaven.

Scripture teaches us that the “joy of the Lord is our strength.” Oh, Christians have difficult times. Things don’t always look joyful, but our faith is not based on feelings but on facts. Christians don’t always hit homeruns when they are at bat. Some hit into double plays and end games. Some make costly errors. Every Christian doesn’t make birdies or eagles in every round. They don’t always make the 2 foot putt that wins the tournament. Some put their ball in the woods blocked from getting a good score. Or even in the water, not once, but twice. Some Christians don’t break par. God never promised we would be remarkable. He promised he would be his witnesses. He promised he would do his part if we do our part. When the world tosses some lemons, make lemonade. After all, people get

thirsty. When the Devil throws his darts at you, stop them with your shield of faith. John's letter reminds us Jesus lives today. And because he does, all life is worth the living. So may we all have fellowship with Jesus Christ and one another, and may our joy be in knowing that the God of yesterday is our God today. Remember God's purpose for your life is to have a personal relationship with him, to fellowship with the Master and to be joyful even when life stinks.

Let the children of God shout 'amen.'