

“Where your heart is”
Westminster Presbyterian Church
October 16, 2016

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Have you ever walked into a grocery store and just been overwhelmed by the sheer number of choices? Seriously, how many kinds of apples does one really need? Psychologist Barry Schwartz, during his popular TEDTalk, says that having too many choices can actually paralyze us and make us, well, miserable. When we stand before a wall of cereal boxes, all boasting to be better than the other, our brains freeze up. We become consumed with fear of making the wrong choice.

That’s why I look like a darned fool standing, mouth agape, for 20 minutes, in a Wegmans aisle, staring at cookies, trying to decide whether my taste buds will be most excited by Double Stuff Golden Oreos or Mint Oreos or any of the other 22 flavors. #FirstWorldProblems

This fear of making the wrong choice, however, goes far beyond cookies. It affects our love lives, our spirituality... and our callings. I remember, back in college, talking with freshmen who had worked themselves into a panic because they were convinced that whatever choice they made now, whatever major they chose to study, would determine the course of the rest of their lives. Now, you and I know that’s simply not true. People change careers all the time. But they were so afraid of making the wrong choice that they stayed undecided sometimes for years.

For three weeks now, we’ve been talking about changing the world. There’s just one problem: there are a whole lot of things in this world that need to be changed, and there are a whole lot of people who need help. And there is just one of you.

Here you are standing in the world’s biggest grocery store, and it’s selling every kind of problem you can think of. You know your cart is not nearly big enough for it all. You can’t possibly tackle every issue, help every person. It’s overwhelming, but somehow you’re going to have to make a choice.

You’re going to have to choose where to devote your time, money, and energy.

The way I see it, we typically respond in three different ways to this conundrum.

Response one: We leave our cart sitting in the aisle, walk out of the store, and refuse to make a choice altogether, saying, “You know what? I can’t possibly change all this, so I’m not going to try; I’m just going to maintain my life. That’s it.”

Or, we try to shove as much stuff in our carts as possible, spend everything we've got in our bank accounts, and go broke, saying, "I can't choose. All these people, all these causes, need me. So I'm going to do it all, even if it means burning out."

Or, we pick our cause and then force everyone else in the store to buy it too, like activists arguing over whose cause is the most important, saying, "I made my choice. And it's the only right choice. So you either follow me, or get knocked down."

It's that last option—that 'my way or the highway' mentality—that has consumed the church in Corinth, addressed in the letter from Paul we read today.

Instead of trying to decide what calling to follow, they've been debating what leader to follow. Factions have emerged, some pledging loyalty to Paul, others to a leader by the name of Apollos. And something's happening in Corinth that every church knows all too well—they're arguing. Each side is convinced that they've made the right choice and that it's their job to snuff out all other choices.

Now, if I were Paul, I admit that I'd be tempted to use this letter as a chance to rally my supporters and go on the offense against my detractors. And maybe Paul *was* tempted. But if so, Paul doesn't give in. Instead of taking sides, Paul affirms both choices, saying that both he and Apollos had an important role to play in growing the Corinthian church. Their leadership styles and functions may be different, but they're all working together for a common purpose.

Your choice does matter, Paul says, but not in the way you think it does.

Paul begins by saying that the Corinthians have been basing their choices on what Paul calls the "flesh"—in other words, the worldly standards of popularity, success, or competition. And this has made them jealous, Paul says. They always want what the other has, because their choices are always based on other people—whether it's trying to be like them, or get one up on them, or please them, or be better than them.

They've spent so much energy worrying about all this that they've never asked themselves the one most important question: Is my heart in this?

Paul says that, through Christ, God has placed a foundation in each of us, a passion and purpose waiting to be nurtured.

"You are God's field," Paul writes, "God building." Stop worrying about what other people are doing, and focus on how God wants *you* to build. "Each builder," Paul says, "must choose with care how to build on... [the] foundation [that] is Jesus Christ."

Christ is already growing something inside of us. Our challenge is to discover what that is and then water it. The growth is God's work. We can be strategic, conduct evaluations, consult data, and come up with plans. But ultimately, whether this work succeeds or fails is not on us; it's in God's hands. We just need to focus on what God is calling us to do today.

That cuts out so many things that we now don't need to worry about. It means we don't need to compete with the church down the street; we just need to focus right here, this moment, on whatever is alive and growing.

What that is today may be different tomorrow. We have many callings throughout our lives, small ones and big ones. Singer, writer, and Presbyterian activist David LaMotte writes, "Instead of asking, 'What do I do with my life?' we should ask 'What do I do next?'"

To know what that is, Paul says, look within. Throughout this letter, Paul talks about the Holy Spirit. He tells the Corinthians that they have received the Spirit of God.

We find our callings by asking the Spirit, Where is Christ already building us up?

What do you care about? What gets you up in the morning? What gets you excited?

I'm not asking what's easy, or pleasant, or familiar. I'm asking, What shakes you? What makes your soul burn to do and be more?

As the Rev. Howard Thurman, mentor to none other than Martin Luther King Jr., says, "Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive."

Once you find that life, you have found Christ. And you know it is Christ because only Christ is capable of bringing the dead to life. Only Christ can resurrect. And when you feel the first pangs of that resurrection in you, go after it. Because like Lazarus, Christ is calling you out.

That is as true for this church as it is for you as an individual. Remember that Paul isn't just writing to individuals; he's speaking with a whole church. He's telling a community like ours how to discern where to build.

That is the adventure that Westminster is beginning, and a big part of that is listening for how the Spirit is moving among us and asking, What has God planted in our lives that we love?

The great Parker Palmer says it this way: "Before you tell your life what you intend to do with it, listen for what it intends to do with you."

We do that by noticing what's growing in our lives and in our community already.

We'll experiment and plant seeds to see what grows and what doesn't.

But to get there, to get this church growing, we have to be all in. Every part of us has to be devoted to following wherever Christ is going to lead us. That means our money, our time, our energy, our skills. That's daunting, until we remember what we're talking about. We're not talking about all the things we get asked to do that burn us out. We're being invited to throw our whole selves into those things that bring us alive and make us burn more.

That's why we've named our stewardship campaign this year at Westminster "where your heart is." Over the next year or more, we're going to be listening for the drumbeat of our hearts, for what makes them drum faster. And that's where we will plant our money, our time, and our energy. That is where we will invest our future, giving of ourselves and creating a dream budget that finances mission, innovation, and growth. That is where we will build. Because *that* is where Christ has already laid the foundation. **Amen.**