

**New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario**  
**Sunday, November 25, 2018**  
**Rev. Dr. David Thompson**

**“The Dream dreaming you!”**

“May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord our Strength and our Redeemer.”

William owned one of the most popular menswear stores in London. One night he dreamt that his store was broken into and a lot of his best items of clothing were stolen. When he saw his friend Bill he said, “Bill I had the best dream last night. I dreamt that my store was broken into and many items were stolen.”

“How can that have been a good dream?” said Bill. If it had been my store and I had a dream like that I would have been really upset!”

“Oh no, I was not as upset as you think I might have been.”

“So why was that?” asked Bill.

“Well I was lucky,” replied William. “In the dream the thief broke into my store and stole my items at a very good time.”

“Surely there is no good time for a robbery?” said Bill. “Why was this a good time?” “Because on the day before the dream, said William, I had just marked everything down by 50%.”

“A merchant looking for fine pearls found one of very special value; so, he went and sold everything he had and bought it!” (Jesus)

For a long time, I have believed in a general purpose for life: To “love God with heart and mind and strength and the neighbor as oneself.” But recently I have been asking the question: Is there a specific purpose for everyone’s life within that great general purpose?

If there is a specific purpose for every person, then the idea is both exciting and troubling. The idea that there is a specific purpose for each of us can be incredibly exciting IF WE DISCOVER IT! Then the adrenalin pumps, the eyes brighten, the smile broadens, and the step becomes firmer.

But the idea is also troubling to me as a pastor because some people never ever seem to be able to discover even a general purpose for living.

Just before the great actor Richard Harris died (he was the one who played Dumbledore in the Harry Potter films) he said this: “I’m not interested in reputation or immortality, or things like that. I don’t care if I’m remembered. I don’t care if I’m not remembered. I don’t care why I am remembered. I genuinely don’t care.” What did that say about his sense of life purpose?

The idea is further troubling to me because some babies die in infancy or are so disabled that it doesn’t seem possible for them to achieve a specific life purpose. But slowly, very slowly I am coming to believe that even in extremely difficult cases, there may still be a specific purpose within the whole scheme of things, which although it may elude us or be very obscure, may nevertheless be present.

Victor Frankel, the author of Logo Therapy, was imprisoned by the Nazis in one of the Jewish death camps and he somehow managed, against great odds, to survive. There he discovered first hand that only people with purpose survived...no other factor was as significant.

Frankly said: “Everyone has their own specific vocation or mission in life; everyone must carry out a concrete assignment that demands fulfillment. Therein they cannot be replaced, nor can their life be repeated.”

Frankel is saying not that a person must have a general purpose but that there is **a specific purpose** for every human life! And that would have to include his Nazi guards and his enemies!

Do you struggle with trying to find a purpose for your life? Do you absolutely know why you are here or is it just some general purpose for you, or not even that?

We might concede that Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, Mother Theresa or Gandhi found specific purposes that gave meaning to their lives and to the lives of many others. But what about ordinary people? Do we have a specific reason why we were placed on earth?

Jesus and St. Paul both teach about having specific purpose. People around them were chosen for specific purposes. Paul’s purpose is to be The Apostle to the Gentiles. Jesus chooses disciples who leave everything to follow him to fulfill their life purpose.

Jesus himself seems to have a specific task that only he can perform.

In the Christian Church there is a tradition that we all have vocation and a calling to fulfill. For St. Paul it was a calling to work at making tents and a calling to preach and write letters that we still have today. And both of his callings reinforced each other to make his ministry possible.

So, just for a moment let's set aside our doubts and consider that Scripture and many great thinkers might be on to something when they say that each of us has a specific purpose for being here. If they are right, how do we go about finding our specific purpose?

Stephen Covey, Roger and Rebecca Merrill in their book First Things First say that we all have three lives: our public life, our private life **and our inner life**. They say that a specific life purpose lies in our inner life. So, what is our inner life?

The late Dr. Wayne Dyer, the psychologist author, had a woman come to him who was deeply depressed. "Tell me," he asked, "Have you been noticing this depression more frequently in recent weeks?"

She responded "Yes."

"Now think carefully before you answer," he went on, "Is **the noticer** depressed?"

She asked him to repeat the question because it was strange to her, that there was also this part of her that was spectating herself. This invisible, formless, boundaryless entity was her higher self. This self, while noticing the world around it, remained distinct from it.

Laurens Van der Post, the great South African author, writes:

"We have to turn inward, to look into ourselves, look into this container which is our soul, look and listen to it. Until you have listened to that thing which is dreaming you- in other words answered the knock on the door in the dark- you will not be able to lift this moment in time in which you are imprisoned, back again **into the level of where the great act of creation is going on.**"

Two parts of what Laurens is saying matter: **That thing that is dreaming us** and **answering that inner knocking at the door inside us.**

First let's notice that it is not us who is knocking. It is not us who are dreaming.

Apparently, Laurens got this insight from an African Bushman hunter.

Laurens was asking him for the birth stories of his people and the beginnings of the Bushman spiritual journey and this hunter replied: "But you see it is very difficult, for **always there is a dream dreaming us.**"

In the stained- glass window in New St. James on my left, Holman Hunt tells us that it is Jesus who knocks at the door of our hearts and spirits: "Behold I stand at the door and knock!" And the door can only open inwards.

The story of Jacob's ladder in the book of Genesis has a ladder on which angels ascend and descend between earth and heaven. Laurens says that this story is a watershed in Hebrew thought: before this parable and vision God was above and human beings were below. Humans merely feared this God and obeyed, but with Jacob's dream all that changed and was reappraised. Suddenly instead of top down only, it was a two-way affair. He says: "It is as if Creator and created, through this dream are being joined in an increasing act of partnership. Indeed, he argues that the dream has taken charge of both God and humans and made them, however disparate the degree of the relationship, **SERVANTS OF A COMMON PURPOSE.**

Let's try to put these insights together:

- 1) There is a noticer- an observer of the self
- 2) Besides the noticer there is also a Knocking going on
- 3) This knocking from within is God
- 4) For the Christian this gets more specific. The knocker is the Historical Jesus who came two thousand years ago to this planet. This man is not dead but is alive and knocks.
- 5) If we deliberately open the door within to God, to the Knocker, then the One who is knocking will come in and participate. Where? In our inner life! Where the noticer is.
- 6) A purpose partnership can then be joined between the individual and God.
- 7) But then something magical begins to happen: A dream dreams Both God and the individual.
- 8) The dream goes beyond self individualism into a great something **more... perhaps destiny is a good word.** And here is Holy ground. The individual in partnership with God is lifted psychically and spiritually to **where the great forward moving act of Creation is actually going on.**

The dream dreams us, both the individual and God, into creating our future and the future of the world. It is open ended. God and the individual go into the unknown together as companions in creativity. When Genesis says that we are all made in the image of God this is what it really means; We are co- creators with God.

This morning we came across the Jesus story of The Pearl of Great Price. The Pearl of Great Price is the discovery of a specific task or mission in life for us as individuals. Something that excites us to our core.

When we listen to the knocking and open the door something magical happens...we can actually fall in love with the One who knocks. We discover that our earthly loves are but shadows of this Great Encounter.

We also pick up companions along the road of life. **I count my true friendships among my greatest treasures. Friendships can deepen.** Life can take on meaning and riches beyond our wildest dreams. The discovery of the pearl of Great Price results in a specific mission, a particular partnership with the God who surfs the foremost waves of creativity and adventure.

Because some folks have difficulty in this area of discovering purpose lets return to practicalities.

1) Note that the merchant doesn't find this pearl quickly. It's after a long search of elimination; so, let's not get discouraged if we haven't found our purpose yet. Think of the merchant examining many pearls. But then one day...

2) There is help also from Stephen Covey. He says "Only as we tap into our conscience can we discover our unique purpose. Conscience, the little voice within, is the dialogue of the **noticer**. Conscience speaks of rightness. It's about deep feelings. He says "When we seek for a specific life purpose, we will notice that when we have found it, we will know by a sense of inner rightness. It will feel good- however hard it may be.

3) There is the knocking within as well. We need to pay attention **for a Partnership awaits**. The prophet Isaiah says of this experience: "Their ears shall hear a word behind thee saying 'this is the way.' The Bushman in Africa described this knocking as a "tapping within". When lost in a desert storm this inner tapping would guide the hunter home both physically and spiritually. In the Scriptures of Judaism this is described as a **still small voice** within that guides us.

Gandhi who lived his life on purpose began his day with these words:

I shall not fear anyone on earth.  
I shall fear only God  
I shall not bear ill will toward anyone  
I shall not submit to injustice from anyone  
I shall conquer untruth by trust  
And resisting untruth I shall put up with all suffering.  
Gandhi's life purpose transformed him and the world.

Walker Meade tells the story about him and his teacher in fourth grade.

Miss Roebuck used to invite her best students to her home in the country as a reward for their hard work. They went often and Walker who was called 'doc' for a nickname was a frequent visitor.

They were often in the kitchen and there he would always notice a red flashlight on the white sink with white adhesive tape with something written on it. He always wondered what it was but never asked.

Everything Miss Roebuck did was to educate her students. She would find a lesson in making her delicious pies in the ingredients, equipment and recipe.

She would say: "Doors will open in your life and if you are not prepared you won't be able to walk through them. Or "You never know what's going to happen to you or for you. You'd better be prepared."

It was in the winter just before Christmas that five of her students were invited to spend a Saturday at Miss Roebuck's when a really bad thing happened to Walker. It had snowed and blown over 10 inches of snow two days before but on the Saturday in question it was clear and sunny.

Walker was dropped off on her front porch. Soon they were going for a nature walk. They came to a crest of a hill when Walker was never seen again. That is what he thought anyway for he had fallen

through a hole in the snow and ended some 6 feet or so in the most complete darkness he had ever known. In his child like mind he had no doubt that he would never be found.

He found himself noticing that he was dizzy and really frightened. The hole smelled like wet fur. Perhaps he was in a black bear den! He sat with his knees tucked up, breathing hard. The blackness terrified him.

Soon he heard Miss Roebuck's voice; "Doc are you alright?"

"I dunno, I can't see anything." he said weakly.

"You have fallen through the roof of an old root cellar. There is nothing to be afraid of. We will have you out in a few minutes. Now sit still."

Soon from above him came a beam of light. A thin, frail shaft of light that fell past him and dispelled his fear in an instant.

Now he could see stone walls and the outline of a door.

He got up and went to the door and pushed against it, but it didn't budge. He pushed harder and harder. Nothing happened.

Is that you today?

Then he heard Miss Roebuck's voice: "Doc please move away from the door." As he did that the door slowly opened and there was Miss Roebuck standing there holding her red flashlight, waiting for him.

She then said with echoes of Hollman Hunt "Some doors open in." She said this so softly and with such gentleness that it didn't make him feel like the idiot he knew he was. There was a lot of laughing then.

When they got back, and they had had pie and apple cider, Walker noticed that the flashlight was back in its familiar place. He asked Miss Roebuck whether he could see it.

She handed it to him without a word. He wanted to know what was written on the flashlight that had freed him from fear. He turned the flashlight in his hand so he could read the writing: "In case of darkness, do something."

You and I live in a very dark time in the world. There is Syria, Yemen, more refugees than the world has ever known, Climate change, people in California who have lost everything. There is an epidemic of depression in Canada that does not respond to drugs or therapy...everywhere we look there is need.

I was listening to a criminal on CBC who had straightened out his life by counselling people behind bars on how to get out and stay out permanently. He said the most powerful drug that lifted him from a life of crime was **purpose**, in this case helping others.

If you are wondering about purpose in your life and are aware of the darkness of the world...listen for the knocking, open the door to the Dream dreaming you, and then remember Miss Roebuck's words: " In case of darkness, do something!"