

Once there was a woman and her husband who had an argument during breakfast. It started out as something very trivial. But it escalated. Then it came time for the wife to get ready to leave for work and she went upstairs to put her dress on.

The dress she had picked out for the day was one of those that zipped up in the back. As she put it on, she tried and tried to get it zipped all the way herself, but it just didn't work. And so, already frustrated, she went to her husband said, "Zip me up."

Well, her husband had been upset with her too, so he grabbed a hold of her zipper and slowly started zipping it up. Just before he finished, he got an idea. He decided to zip it up and down really fast. Then he finished and looked at her and smiled.

She thought about it all day at work. The more she thought about it, the more and more angry she became. All day, she became obsessed with getting even with her husband. She thought of several different plans.

By the end of the day, she drove home confident that she would get even with him. However, when she drove up to the house, she saw her husband's car sitting in the driveway. And poking out from underneath the car were two legs.

Immediately she got an idea. She walked right up to her husband's car, right up to those legs sticking out from underneath the car. She bent over. She grabbed a hold of the pants. She grabbed the zipper with her other hand. She zipped that zipper up and down as fast as she could. When she got done, she straightened herself, brushed off her hands. She started walking into the house, feeling so good about how she had gotten even with her husband.

When she opened the door to the house, she looked up and in her horror, there sat her husband. In a panic she said, "What are you doing here? And who is that under your car?"

"Out there? He's our neighbor."

I bet that woman wanted to crawl into a hole. Unfortunately that woman had become so obsessed with getting even that she ended up embarrassing herself. Has that ever happened to you?

It is so easy to get distracted from doing what is important. It is so easy to get sidetracked from living a life of faith. It is so easy to lose focus of God and what is important in our life.

Today we are continuing our sermon series called, *Who Are We? Reclaiming an Identity*. It is based upon our mission statement as a church. Please look at the very beginning of your bulletin. There you will find our mission statement. Let's read it together. *The mission of Sun Prairie United Methodist Church is to invite and welcome people to be committed and compassionate followers of Jesus Christ through worship, through spiritual growth, through fellowship and through service to others.*

Today, we are going to talk about what how important it is to be committed to a life of regular worship and spiritual growth. It is this commitment, to worship and spiritual growth that can help us deal with the distractions that come to life.

We live in a world that tells us life is really about us getting what we want. We live in a world that tells us we should take care of our needs. We live in a world that says take care of yourself first.

This is so seductive, because these messages are all around us. We can buy into them, without even consciously thinking of them. Yet, these messages can get us into trouble.

The importance of being committed to worship and spiritual growth can help us get on track and stay on track in life. So that when challenges come our way, we can stay focused on God and on how much God cares about us.

In our scripture for today, the Psalmist is longing for God. The psalmist is longing to go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and be in the presence of God at the temple. The words he uses are beautiful. *As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.*

But if you continue to read the psalm, you quickly learn that this longing is not able to be fulfilled at the moment, because most likely the author has an injury that is preventing him from traveling. What is interesting about this is that the people who lived during this time believed that suffering and illness were signs that God had withdrawn from you. That God no longer cared for you. That God had become mad at you. And many people would give up on God then, in response.

But the author of this psalm did not let the adversity or the distractions he faced, stop him from longing for God, for seeking out God, for yearning for God, for trusting in God. He understood that God cared about him. He understood that God loved him. He understood that God wanted to heal him.

Being committed to worship and spiritual growth is one of the most important priorities we make in our life. Because it reminds us that God loves us. God cares for us. God accepts us as we are and make us into what we can become as people of God.

Are you willing to make worship a priority for your life? Are you willing to make growing in faith a priority for your life? If so, what are some practical things you are willing to do to show that these are priorities for you? Are you willing to come to worship each week? Are you willing to come three out of four Sunday's? Are you willing to take time for regular prayer and study?

You see, if we are going to make worship and spiritual growth a priority, we have to make a commitment to it. What are you willing to commit to?

There was once a young man who had been arrested and found himself in jail. He had become such an angry young man. He felt like people had betrayed him. He felt like his family had betrayed him. He felt like people had hurt him and cheated him.

In response, he felt like it was okay for him to get even with the world by hurting and cheating back. It seemed to be working until he ended up in jail for stealing and for murder.

While he was in jail, a priest often came to visit the prisoners. The priest struck up several conversations with him. Over time, he saw the young man soften from being so angry and hard, to one who was willing to have a conversation.

One day, the priest came and found the young man willing to talk about what he had done. In the conversation the young man said, "I have made so many mistakes. I have hurt so many people. I would love a chance to start over. I want to be different."

The priest said to him, "I can help you start over."

The young man said, "Great. When can we start?"

The priest said, "Right now, first, let me tell you a story."

The young man said, "A story, I don't need to hear a story. I want to learn how to live better."

The priest said, "Ah, my friend. I will help you. But we must begin with a story, because the story of life you have learned has led you to hurt others and it is destroying you. If you want to start over, you must learn a new story. It is a story of God and God's love for you. It is a story of how you can learn to live as a child of God and let God's love flow through you to others. This is the story you must learn if you want to start over."

I love it. I think it is true. We learn the story of God and God's love for us when we come to worship. We learn the story of how we can let God's love flow through us to touch others, when we become committed to including worship and spiritual growth to our journey of faith.

What about you? Are you willing to be committed to worship and spiritual growth? How will you put that into action in your life?

May God help us live a life of faith.

Amen