

Homily3809

**“AS WE BEGIN...THE KEY TO SUCCESS”**

**A homily delivered by  
The Reverend Douglas W. Fromm  
Community Church at Upper Ridgewood  
Ridgewood, New Jersey  
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*The twenty fifth anniversary of his ministry at Community Church***

**Scripture lessons: Romans 8:28-31, 37-39**

**St. Mark 9: 14-24**

The question is as old as questions themselves.

Why do some succeed in life while others fail? Or, to put it another way...

...Why do some people realize their life's dream, while others seem to miss them in part or entirely?

A scientist grows weary of hearing of case after case of polio myelitis...

...crippling and maiming child after child.

He dedicates his life, his work, with all his intensity and energy focused...

...to researching and reaching for what seems to so many as the impossible.

He pursues his dream...he dedicates himself...to one day discovering...

... a means of...inoculation that will immunize children...

...against...the mysterious...elusive...destructive virus that causes polio in children.

In time, Dr. Jonas Salk discovers the long dreamed of breakthrough...a vaccine...

...the now taken for granted...Salk Vaccine.

Polio becomes a disease of the past!

A woman knows first hand...the agony of racial bigotry.

A child of slave ancestors...her family is not prominent in either wealth or power.

She dreams of one day going to college and becoming a lawyer.

She sets her sights...hones her mind...captures honors and scholarships...

...eventually matriculating through college and law school...

...passing her bar examinations on the first try.

Her mind is keen...her intensity fixed...her integrity beyond question.

In time she becomes the first African American woman elected to the US Congress...

...from a southern state...the great state of Texas.

As history would have it, Barbara Jordan was to become...

...one of the leading legal lights, reasoned voices and steady hands...

...that guided this country through the treacherous shoals...

...of the impeachment hearings of President Richard Nixon.

Her calm, reasoned voice held sway as the Constitution of the United States...

...was put to its severest test since its inception at the founding of this country.

A young man stands gazing across the Atlantic Ocean...

...dreaming of what it would be like to cross, by air, that large, vast, body of water.

The dream of an intercontinental flight takes hold of him...pushing and pulling at him...

...until one morning the Spirit of St. Louis takes off for the first trans-Atlantic flight.

A dream fulfilled for the many...by the one.

A twenty five year old graduate student...at Boston University...

...mentored by the Dean of the Chapel, Howard Thurman...

...dreams a dream...later eloquently proclaimed.

A dream of white and black folk living together with equal rights under the law.

A dream that there would be no more signs reading...whites only...colored only.

A dream that white and black children could run and laugh and play together...

...in the Red Hills of Georgia.

A dream that this country could be a model for the world...a city set on a hill...

...of peacefully achieving human, civil rights for everyone regardless of race.

Countless miles marched and years later...

...the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. begins to see his dream realized...

...as comprehensive Civil Rights legislation is passed.

Southern, black voters are allowed to vote...and the grip of years of prejudice...

...begins to slacken and slough away.

The list could go on and on...could it not.

The list of women and men...from sports, politics, every walk of life...

...who have left their good mark on life.

Such lives prompt the question:

WHY DO SOME PEOPLE ACHIEVE GREAT THINGS...

...WHILE OTHERS ACHIEVE LITTLE?

WHY DO SOME PEOPLE GIVE AND GET THE BEST...

...AND OTHERS SEEM TO MISS OUT?

WHY DO SOME PEOPLE SUCEED IN LIFE WHILE OTHERS FAIL?

The answer is quite simple:

...they expect to...they expect to succeed...they expect to do great things...

...they expect the best of themselves and of others.

It is a fundamental truth and life principle that when you focus your energy...

...on any of life's problems, conundrums, or puzzling challenges...

...when you give of your complete self...mind, body, and soul...

...toward the achievement of any of your dreams...

...when you believe in yourself and your God given abilities...

...when you learn to expect the best of yourself...and not doubt yourself...

...THEN EVERYTHING MOVES INTO THE REALM OF POSSIBILITY...

...AND DIFFICULTIES...DISUNITY...AND OBSTACLES...

...DETERIORATE AND DISAPPEAR.

The impossible becomes possible...the dream realized...the goal achieved!

You are defeated in life not because of lack of ability, but for lack of whole heartedness.

Results do not yield themselves to the person who refuses...

...to give himself to desired results.

Results do not yield themselves to the person who holds back a part of herself...

...because of self doubts and reservations.

When the entire concentration of all your forces...

...physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual whole heartedness...

...when the central essence of your personality is brought to bear...

...when there is the consolidation and complete self giving of your powers employed...

...you become quite irresistible and obstacles melt away.

That is the profound point of the narrative read for the Gospel this morning.

The father brought his son to be healed.

The son was in today's parlance...an epileptic...all the symptoms were there.

The distraught father approached the disciples.

He asked them to heal his son...if they would.

They tried and failed...they appeared helpless...that is what the hub bub was about.

Then Jesus arrived.

With a note of annoyance and disappointment at the disciples disbelief in themselves...

...Jesus instructs them to BRING THE BOY TO ME!

The father pleads: HELP US...IF YOU CAN!

Jesus responds: IF YOU CAN...EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE FOR THE PERSON...

...WHO HAS FAITH.

Now don't miss the subtle interaction and teaching here.

Jesus is saying:

LOOK...I KNOW I CAN HEAL.

I DON'T DOUBT MYSELF FOR ONE MINUTE.

BUT WHAT ABOUT YOU?

WHAT OF YOUR FAITH...YOUR TRUST...YOUR BELIEF?

DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO REALLY BELIEVE...

...I MEAN REALLY...

...REALLY AND TRULY BELIEVE AND TRUST THAT YOUR SON...

...CAN AND WILL BE HEALED?

A miracle they said that once upon a time moment... a miracle you say today...

...as you look back on the boy's being successfully healed by Jesus.

But, what miracle???

Nothing more miraculous than Jesus using one of the most important laws of life...

...one of the most powerful laws in the world...

...a law recognized alike today by psychology and religion.

It is the law...the practice of changing your mental habits to belief instead of unbelief.

Remember what the father said after seeing the healing of his son.

I BELIEVE...HELP MY UNBELIEF!

Learn to expect...not to doubt!

In so doing you bring everything into the realm of possibility for yourself and others.

William James, the philosopher and educator...once said of people...

...COMPARED TO WHAT WE OUGHT TO BE...

...WE ARE ONLY HALF AWAKE.

WE ARE MAKING USE OF ONLY A SMALL PART OF OUR PHYSICAL...

...AND MENTAL RESOURCES.

STATING THE THING BROADLY...

...THE HUMAN INDIVIDUAL THUS LIVES FAR WITHIN HIS LIMITS.

HE POSSESSES POWER OF VARIOUS SORTS...

...WHICH HE HABITUALLY FAILS TO USE.

If you know what you want...

...if you know where you want to go with your life...  
...if you know where your heart lies...and what it seeks after...  
...if you know what dreams you want to come true...to be realized...  
...if you set your goals...focus your sights clear and distinct...  
...if you fix your mind on them...  
...if you believe in the God given powers you have deep within yourself...  
...use all your physical...mental and spiritual resources...  
...then...every good thing you want for yourself...becomes for you a possibility...  
...and you can expect good results.

I recall the eventful night when the pianist Leon Fleisher returned to the concert stage.

He had been absent for seventeen years.

As a young, celebrated pianist of profound promise and acclaim...

...he had completely lost the use of his right hand...

...and had to give up playing the piano and of concertizing.

Now some would have said: THAT'S IT...IT'S OVER...FINISHED...

...only to be left to mourn THE CAREER THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN.

But, instead of giving up on his life dream...Leon Fleisher...

...set his goal of someday returning to the concert stage.

He pushed himself with countless hours of examinations...

...both psychiatric and physiological sessions.

He endured operations and endless hours of physical therapy to strengthen his hand.

After seventeen, grueling years of determination he returned to the concert stage...

...playing with both hands.

The program included Franck's Symphonic Variations for the piano and orchestra...

...and closed with a wildly applauded encore of...Chopin's Nocturn in D. Flat.

In writing of the event...the New York Times critics were amazed...

...citing that GROWN MEN AND WOMEN WEPT OPENLY.

Life cannot deny itself to the person who gives life his or her all.

Dreams can be realized...goals can be achieved...

...life can be good for you...and if that is true for individuals...

...it is no less true for this congregation...this community at Upper Ridgewood.

Some here this morning, dream of this church having an education ministry...

...where every child and adult can come to know, understand...

...and articulate their own faith.

Some here this morning, dream of programs for the middle and senior high youth...

...where service is offered with fun and learning.

Some here dream of a sanctuary filled with persons of all ages, genders and backgrounds.

Some here this morning dream of stewardship...of time and talents...

...where mission determines the budget and not budget the mission.

Some here dream of a strong program of giving that supports and endows...

...the mission of this church into its long future.

There are some here who dream that this congregation become...

...an arena where open discussion of social concerns can take place without judgement...

...where Christian action becomes a term realized in sheltering and work camping.

There are some here who dream of the day...

...when there is just enough pastoral care shown by one to another...

...so that no person shut in or shut out would go a week without...

...a note...a call...or a visit from someone in the church family.

The dreams are many and everyone one of them can become a reality...

...if you want them to.

If you really want this church to strengthen and expand the reach of its ministry...

...if you really want that to happen...

...if you put your hearts...minds and souls...

...toward the reaching of those dreams...then you, individually and as a congregation...

...will succeed in what are today only dreams and hopes.

EVERYTHING, said Jesus, IS POSSIBLE FOR THE PERSON WHO BELIEVES...

...WHO HAS FAITH.

And, if you and I expect the best of our selves and one another...

...if you and I give the best of our selves...

...we will receive and experience the best in return.

When I was in seminary...my homiletic and speech professor, Dr. William Beeners...

...told a story about Louis B, Mayer...of Metro- Goldwin Mayer...fame.

One day before the Mayer family was to take a trip to the west...

...Louis had been in a serious fight...and his mother knew it.

Louis was angry but said nothing and his mother said nothing.

When they arrived west...one morning she went to young Louie and said:

LOUIE I KNOW ABOUT THE FIGHT...

I WANT YOU TO COME WITH ME.

Mother and son walked a ways and came to a place where the mountain range...

...stretched magnificently before their eyes.

Motioning to the vastness before them...Louie's mother said:

LOUIE I WANT YOU TO SHOUT TO THOSE HILLS...

...WHAT I HEARD YOU SAY YESTERDAY.

He hesitated...his mother persisted.

After a moment or two...Louie squared his shoulders...

...and in as loud a voice as he could muster...he shouted to the hills...

DAMN YOU...DAMN YOU...DAMN YOU! I HATE YOU!

It wasn't long before he heard his voice echoing back to him:

DAMN YOU...DAMN YOU...DAMN YOU! I HATE YOU!

Mother and son stood side by side in silence for while.

She spoke:

LOUIE, NOW I WANT YOU TO SAY SOMETHING GOOD.

He stood there a moment...not sure of what was going on...

...then squaring his shoulders again...with all his voice he shouted to the hills...

YOU'RE BEAUTIFUL...AMAZING...I LOVE YOU...I LOVE YOU!

In no time at all he heard echoing back to him:

YOU'RE BEAUTIFUL...AMAZING...I LOVE YOU...I LOVE YOU!

Hi mother turned him to her...face to face...looking him square in the eye and said:

LOUIE...I DON'T EVER WANT YOU TO FORGET THIS...IT'S A LAW OF LIFE.  
WHAT YOU GIVE TO THE WORLD...THE WORLD WILL GIVE BACK TO YOU.

If you and I here at Community Church...expect and give the best of ourselves...  
...to one another...  
...we will get the best in return.

Today...as I begin my ministry with you...I bind my heart and all my being to that goal.

*Now some of you will say...THAT I MADE A MISTAKE IN THE VERB USED HERE...  
...WHEN I SAID...TODAY...AS I **BEGIN** MY MINISTRY.*

*No, not so!*

*I did not mistakenly choose the wrong verb by using the present tense...**BEGIN**.*

*This was the first homily that I preached from this pulpit as the "new minister"  
...on the second Sunday of March in the year 1984...twenty five years ago today.*

*It was true and trustworthy then...and it is true and trustworthy today!*

The word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!

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