

“Whatever”

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia
Thanksgiving Sunday, Season of Pentecost, November 20, 2016
James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

Holy Scriptures: Psalm 100; Philippians 4: 4-9; John 6: 35

Psalm 100

1 Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. 2 Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing.
3 Know that the Lord is God. It is he that made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.
4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name.
5 For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

Philippians 4: 4-9

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. 5 Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. 6 Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
8 Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9 Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

John 6:35

Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

Sermon

Whatever

Martin Marty was based in the Chicago area while he taught at the University of Chicago, raised his family, and wrote for the magazine *Christian Century*.
Martin Marty told a story about what he saw when he was in Pennsylvania. Here is a paraphrase of his story; it’s been a while since I first read it.

One Saturday when his responsibility was concluded in the Pennsylvania town, he aimed his car for I-70 and home.

However, as he drove down a street toward the on-ramp, he passed a pretty church with a marquee on the lawn.

Being a thoughtful Christian and all that Martin Marty read the title posted for the next day’s sermon.

“*Whatever It Is*”

Whatever It Is? What kind of title is that, he thought.

What in the world could the preacher be planning to talk about?

The drive from Pennsylvania to Illinois covered some 500 miles.

For 500 miles Martin Marty mulled in his mind a multitude of possibilities.
Would the preacher wax poetic on the whatever of God's Creation?
the whatever of the Mission of Jesus to the Jews and Gentiles and Samaritans?
How about, Whatever was said in the missing missives from the Early Church?
Whatever is to become of decency in the human context in such a time as this?

Whatever are we in, peril or paradise?

Dr. Marty arrived home safe and sound on Sunday evening, his mind awhirl.
First thing he did on Monday morning
was to look up the phone number for the church.
He punched in the number.

We'll come back to that in a bit.

Whatever

Whatever you do and are counts.

Whatever matters.

Whatever choices you choose have a bearing.

Whatever core values direct your mind and will are significant.

Paul said, "*Beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable,*

whatever is just, whatever is pure,

whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable,

if there is any excellence and

if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."

May our choices for truth, for honor, for justice, for purity,

for actions and words and prayers

be pleasing to God.

Whatever you and I choose matters, is relevant, carries some weight.

May our decisions and follow through be commendable.

That's what the Apostle Paul communicated to the Christian Church in Philippi.

This is his living message to the Christian Church in Decatur.

Whatever am I to do?

Whatever choices should I make in response to God's will for me?

Whatever in the world does God want with my life now?

Whatever is God calling me to do and to share?

Think about these things. Think. Ponder. Pray about these things.

Whatever

One morning Peggy Norton shared with me a small card with teeny tiny print.

Printed there was a quote from Charles Swindoll, one that had impacted her life.

Swindoll's faith had helped Peggy Norton's faith.
That is how Jesus works.
The faith of our friends can save us.

Charles Swindoll wrote:

*"The longer I live,
the more I realize the impact of attitude on life.
Attitude, to me, is more important than facts.
It is more important than the past, than education,
than money, than circumstances,
than failures, than successes,
than what other people think or say or do.
It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill.
It will make or break a company...a church....a home.*

*The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day
regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day.
We cannot change our past...
we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way.
We cannot change the inevitable.
The only thing we can do
is play on the one string we have,
and that is our attitude...
I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me
and 90% how I react to it.
And so it is with you...
we are in charge of our attitudes."*

Whatever

Author Annie Dillard said,
"How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives."
You and I might say the same
about our practice of faithful stewardship.
How we spend our time, talent and treasure is, of course, how we spend our lives.
How we utilize the smallest gifts we are given by God
is, of course, directly connected with how we use the Lord's greatest gifts.
May our tithes that we bring forward and lay at the altar
and our pledges for the future reflect how we spend our days, and our lives.

Church treasurers cringe whenever this pastor says in worship,
"Those with abundance please give; those in need please take."

Consider this: Sunday in and Sunday out those in the pews at my home church,
the Church of the Living Hope in NYC,

heard their pastor offer the same invitation to faithful stewardship.

“Those with abundance please give; those in need please take.”

Sure, you may have in your mind’s eye an image of a broke and broken church because surely as the plate was passed folks snatched out bills and loose coins.

Chaos and catastrophe must have overwhelmed mission and meaning.

Au contraire

The Church of the Living Hope is a vibrant, living, breathing, serving, missional community of faith that is going strong in her mid-50s.

In times lean or fat, thick or thin,

offering plates are passed,

folks are invited to give out of their abundance or receive as need dictates, and grace abounds.

The Lord provides.

Whatever the Lord intends to be,

the Lord will supply the resources, the talent, the treasure, the team.

We here at First Christian Church of Decatur

can testify that 95 years into our journey we are still growing strong.

We are thriving and giving thanks daily

for the generosity and grace of our members and friends

who share our faith, our intellect,

our commitment to social justice,

our healing power, our hospitality, our hope,

our commitment to do and be and share whatever is commendable.

Whatever

Let’s return to Martin Marty.

He had arrived home on Sunday evening, his mind awhirl.

First thing he did on Monday morning

was to look up the phone number for the church.

He punched in the number.

As soon as someone picked up he said, “Please tell me something.

I have got to know what the preacher talked about

in yesterday’s sermon called “Whatever It Is”.”

“Oh, that,” said the voice on the other end of the line.

“Early last week I called the preacher before I did the church marquee.

I asked what his sermon title was,

and he hemmed and hawed until finally he said,

‘Oh, I don’t know, put up whatever it is.’”

Whatever It Is

“...whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and

if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”

Let us covenant to ponder and pray

on our choices, our attitudes, our priorities, our dreams.

We bear in our daring bodies the dreams of God.
Be open to whatever God's will is for your daring self.

Sometimes it takes a while for dreams to come to fruition.
Dream anyway.
Be patient, be persistent.

A dream deferred may one day become fully realized for the betterment of humankind.
Discover afresh the transformative power of big dreams.
So dream now.
Share them, whatever they may be.

College basketball coach Charles "Lefty" Driesell had big dreams,
so he engaged others in his vision,
and lived everyday by these principles
with regard to his student athletes:
know them, grow them, inspire them, involve them, and reward them.

Whose dreams have changed your life?
With whom do you need to share your own dreams and visions?
Following our dreams serves to connect us with whom we are meant to become.

The Bohemian-Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke's tenet is "*to dig deep
to find a strong, simple 'I must,' then build your life in accordance with it.*"

Find the 'I must' in your own life.
Whatever it is!

Let's start afresh, here, as new lives and revived relationships in Christ
gathered together at the Lord's Table of thanksgiving.
Let's begin anew by communing with the Christ.

Isn't that how Jesus works?

The faith of our Friend can save us.

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!