

“Flattening the Curb”

John 10:7-11

Series: More – Find Your Personal Calling and Live Life to the Fullest Measure

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The Woodside Church

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Never in all my years of ministry would I imagine preaching on Easter to an empty room – and be happy about it! Why? This hollow hall means we are united in staying home to stop the coronavirus. Thank you for doing your part to defeat this disease. I have to admit I’m also secretly overjoyed because I didn’t have to get up at 4 am for a Sunrise service this morning. I don’t need to race back and forth to preach four times in a four service marathon. And I get to spend my Easter Sunday at home in my pajamas with a cup of coffee watching myself online. Hi Doug!

So many unexpected, unimaginable events are overtaking us. One church member writes, “I really didn’t plan on giving up this much for Lent.” Another person said, “Those poor teachers – they finally get a break to go to the bathroom and there’s no toilet paper!” Many grocery store shelves are empty...and not just toilet paper. The entire freezer section is empty of ice cream... except for the sugar-free ice cream. And many are wearing a mask or a scarf in public. My brother-in-law in New Jersey says he felt kind of funny going into a bank wearing a red bandana.

Here’s another strange thing: my town began tearing up my street just as the coronavirus hit. They also removed the entrance and the sidewalk in front of my house making it impossible to leave my driveway. Man, these people take the stay-at-home order seriously! So while we are all working hard at flattening the curve, the contractors are outside flattening my curb.

Anyone out there feel cut off? Your agenda upended? Your plans and pathway suddenly severed? All of us, in varying degrees, feel detached and disconnected from the outside world. Schools and stores closed. Shuttered businesses and a shattered economy. Proms, graduations, weddings and funerals cancelled. Isolation, anxiety and fear growing. Hot spots spreading, government leaders scrambling, hospitals stretched and struggling. And always the number of sick and dead keep rising. These are dark times. The Surgeon General, Dr. Jerome Adams says,

“This is going to be the hardest and the saddest week of most Americans’ lives. This is going to be our Pearl Harbor moment, our 9/11 moment. Only it’s not going to be localized, it’s going to be happening all over the country.”

This is undoubtedly a tragic moment. That is why we all must unite to make it a triumphant moment. During the darkest hour, when Nazi bombs rained down on Britain, the people in their homes remembered the words of Winston Churchill: “This will be our finest hour.”

As we all work to flatten the curve, now is the time to ask God to flatten our curb. What is a curb? It’s more than the concrete which lines your street. A curb is a boundary, a border, a barrier. What are these curbs? Anything – good or bad – which becomes the main focus of your life instead of God. Anything which takes first place, God’s place, in your life. Work, success, money, achievement, power, control, popularity, approval – even good things like health, hobbies, home life – are a curb when they become the main focus of your life. What’s wrong with these curbs?

Curbs demand more. There will always be more work to do, more people to please, more stuff to accumulate, more achievements to accomplish, more money to amass. Each one of these curbs has a scorecard. How much money do I make or save? How many awards and achievements are on my resume? How many friends on social media? Churches are no exception. Do you know what the scorecard is for Pastors? Church attendance. How many people sit in the pews? Pastors use increasing church attendance as the scorecard for how well they are doing. Well, God sure showed us that scorecard is empty – literally.

Curbs let you down. Why is there so much anxiety and fear right now? The coronavirus instantly took away the things we depend on. You depend on your business but now it's closed. You depend on your job but now you're unemployed. You depend on your 401K but it's dropped. You depend on this community but now we can't even get near each other. You depend on your family but now you can't be with them or they are driving you crazy. Someone wrote, "Why did Pennsylvania close all the liquor stores? Don't they know I'm going to be stuck at home with my spouse and kids?" You depend on your health but even that is threatened. CoVid19 is giving us a rude wake up call to the reality that the curbs we depend on can't support us. They weren't designed to do that. They will ultimately let us down.

Jesus let the disciples down. At least that's what they thought on Friday. Five days before they marched into Jerusalem with high expectations, He would drive out the Romans with the power of God, begin His worldwide kingdom and give them top positions in the new administration. Right up to the Last Supper, they argue over who will sit where in His royal court. A few hours later, everything turns terribly wrong. Jesus is arrested, tried, tortured and executed. The powerful Messiah they staked their lives on is nailed to a stake. He lets them down. What do the disciples do? They suddenly decide to obey the stay at home order – behind locked doors. After all, their Master's dead body is solidly locked behind a huge stone curb.

Then early, Sunday morning, God makes that stone fall over like a flattened curb. God the Father turns this utterly tragic moment into a triumph. The resurrection of Jesus proves God is completely dependable, He will never let you down. He is all you ever need. When Jesus appears inside the disciples' house, He teaches them the real purpose and plan for their lives – not to sit on thrones in Jerusalem but to go and share God's abundant life with everyone. Jesus says,

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." John 10:10-11

And in the letter to Ephesians we recently heard:

For we are God's masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:10

Jesus came, died and rose to give you an overflowing abundant life. You are God's masterpiece and His plan and purpose for you is to spread God's full abundant life to every person, every other masterpiece on the planet. Why don't we know this?

Curbs distract you from God's plan and purpose for you. If you focus on the wrong plan, it's hard to see God's better plan for you. Before they began tearing up my street, the entrance to my driveway was 13 feet wide. The township informed us they would increase it to 20 feet if I submitted a request in writing. I did and everything was fine until the day I happened to look out my front window and see the workers marking off my new entrance at 13 feet wide. I raced outside and informed them it's supposed to be 20 feet. The worker shook his head. He unrolled the blueprints and said, "You see this? This here is the Bible and it says 13 feet." "But I told the township 20 feet." He pointed again at the blueprints. "This here is the Bible. If the Bible says 13 feet it's 13 feet." "But it's wrong," I replied. "Look" he jabbed at the plans, "This here is the Bible. Do you know how to read the Bible?" "Yes, I do know how to read the Bible and that there ain't no Bible." I told him. "So what do I have to do to rewrite that Bible?" He gave me the engineer's number, we rewrote the plans and they made it 20 feet.

In life, it's easy to follow the wrong bible. Curbs block your view of what God designed you to be, what God plans for you to do, where God wants you to go. You and I now have an unparalleled opportunity to flatten the curb, to stop following the wrong scorecard, the put aside the wrong bible. With all this time at home, with all the usual busy and hurry out of the way, now is the perfect time to ask God, "Why am I here?" "What do you want me to do?" "Where do you want me to go?" Maybe you've already been asking yourself these questions. Why?

Curbs cause restless discontent. Staying at home probably makes you feel restless. Like a caged animal, you just want to get out. You've taken your dog on so many walks he or she is now hiding from you. Living your life stuck behind curbs will also make you restless and discontent. You know you were made for more than this.

You were made to live in your sweet spot. A baseball bat, tennis racket and golf club are designed with a sweet spot. If you hit the ball on that spot with the right swing and skill it will soar. Everything in creation has a sweet spot. God, the Maker of all things, also designed you, His masterpiece with a sweet spot. It's the place where your gifts and passion match the world's needs. It's the place where everything comes together. It's the place where you really connect and soar.

How do you find your sweet spot? The answer lies at the intersection of three questions:

Who am I created to BE – what is my identity?

What am I created to DO – what is my mission?

Where am I created to GO – what is my position?

I want to help you find your sweet spot - the place where all three come together. This spring we will examine a study called More: Find Your Personal Calling and Live Life to the Fullest Measure. I will be hosting an online webinar this coming Wednesday, April 15 at 7 pm to help you find your calling and purpose. Take a break from Netflix and invest an hour in discovering your sweet spot. You do not have to be from Woodside. You do not have to be in this country. Sign up on the Connection Card and we'll email you the link for the webinar. Invite someone to join you. When you flatten your curb with God's help it becomes the pathway to finding your purpose.

Woodside is blessed with an incredible staff – people who have found their calling and are serving in their sweet spots – especially during the challenging times of CoVid19. Let me tell you about one of them: Sue Harris-Miller. Sue was stuck behind a curb. For 18 years she enjoyed a successful career in the financial services industry. But she began to get restless in her job. The one aspect she enjoyed was helping people. Sue ignored the nudge but the frustration mounted.

“I would honestly cry after work at times. It wasn’t healthy or even normal. I knew I did not want to stay miserable in a job for the next 20 years. I owed it to myself, my family and my health to make a change.”

At the same time Sue was working on her relationship with Jesus here at Woodside. She learned how Jesus made her for more. But what? In May of 2018, Sue took a leap of faith and quit her job. She wanted to find out what she was designed to be and do.

“I spent the next few weeks in a daze, not really comprehending what I had just done. I wanted to help others so when the Director of Mission at Woodside opened up, I applied. In the past 8 months, I feel more fulfilled than I ever did in my previous job of 18 years. I love finding ways to connect those in need to those who want to help.”

Sue is a spark who ignites a wildfire of mission. Even the coronavirus cannot stop her. She teamed up with another staff member Tom Fowler who is not only our Director of Hospitality but also has 41 years’ experience in the restaurant business. With his restaurant in Trenton closed, he offered to make meals for those in need. Tom Fowler and John and Helen Hughes made 240 meals for Cast Your Cares in Kensington. Sue worked with Tom Fowler and Susi Meade to make meals for homeless neighbors here in Bucks county. Sue Harris-Miller arranged for us to make weekend meals for hungry children in Trenton and 64 Easter dinners for Urban Promise in Trenton. Sue posted instructions for making masks for healthcare workers, she’s working with Sue Rushing to arrange drivers to bring food from McCafferys to St. Mary Chemotherapy patients. And Sue and Tom are organizing a new mission called Feeding Hungry Heroes. Your donation on our website will purchase meals made in Woodside’s kitchen which will serve healthcare workers at St. Mary’s and Jefferson Bucks Hospitals and first responders.

Sue is in her sweet spot. She says, “I am exactly where I am supposed to be.”

If you want God to flatten your curb so you can find your sweet spot and be exactly where you are supposed to be, then join me in the Easter Greeting:

He is Risen!

He is Risen Indeed!