

## One Thing

Preached by Rev. Patrick Hunnicutt  
Westminster Presbyterian Church  
March 2, 2008

Focus Text: John 9: 1-41

*“One thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see.”*

I have been taught that preachers aren't supposed to share too much of their private lives. This is to protect families, of course, and sermons should not dwell on the pastor, but on the living Word of God.

But with Sally's permission, your silent assent, and God's enduring patience, this morning I want to share a phenomenon that happens quite frequently in the Hunnicutt household.

I will ask a question, a simple question seeking a simple answer. For example, “Where did you and your friend, Stef, go to lunch today?” “Well,” Sally will say, “Stef wanted to return the sweater she got for her birthday. So we went to Anne Taylor Loft, and I saw this great blouse; it was emerald green, and it matches my new pants really well. Unfortunately, they didn't have my size, so I think I'll wait for the next sale. Stef couldn't decide whether she wanted to exchange her sweater or just get a refund. I thought she should just get a refund and buy something else later when she saw something she liked...she took forever to decide. she can be so indecisive sometimes...One time, back in college, she was trying to choose a major, and I...”

At this point I'll jump in and say, “Sally, thanks, but uh, where did you and Stef go to lunch yesterday?” “Oh. Lebanese Taverna!” Sigh...

Now, this is not just a “men are from mars, women are from Venus” kind of moment. This phenomenon happens quite frequently here at worship.

Every Sunday, you come into this chapel/sanctuary with your own set of questions. Sometimes, you want to know how God, or the Bible, or faith can relate to your life. Or, you have a decision to make and you want to know what you're supposed to do, whether you should make that leap of faith. You come with theological questions, such as, “What does believing in Christ look like in such a religiously diverse culture? Or, “How can such evil persist in this world?” You come hoping that our service, and perhaps our sermons, will provide some answers to your questions.

But I'd be willing to bet that you often find yourself experiencing far more from worship than you bargained for, but getting far less of what you were looking for:

- Far more beauty, when you wanted clarity.
- Far more complexity, when you wanted brevity.
- Far more challenge, when you wanted an affirmation. Or affirmation, when you wanted a challenge.

And, to quote U2, you sometimes leave without having found what you are looking for.

The premise of this sermon is that maybe you already have it. That maybe God has already provided that which you need for today.

There is SO much to say and preach about this passage from John. It invites so many tangents. But what excites me most is *the one thing*.

A man, born blind, encounters Jesus, who makes mud, spreads it on his eyes, and tells him to wash. So he goes, he washes, and his eyes are opened. That's the one thing.

In the rest of the story, that one thing gets pummeled by fear and skepticism.

- The man's neighbors refuse to see that the former beggar in their midst now walks among them with his eyes opened;
- The Pharisees bang their heads against the wall with their legalism, trying to distract themselves from the obvious miracle in their midst.
- The powers-that-be, the establishment (whom the writer of John identifies as the Jews, which tragically has contributed to millennia of anti-Semitism, but that's the story of another sermon), refuse to believe this man's story; refuse to believe that a man called Jesus might have performed such a sign.
- Even the man's parents cower, fearful that their son's sight might cost them the security of their way of life.

But in the face of all of this questioning and doubt, the man returns, again and again, to one thing.

"I do not know whether [the man who healed me] is a sinner" he says. "But *one thing* I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." (9:25)

No matter what happens to him, he has that moment. When life gets hard, (as it does for him – see his expulsion from his spiritual and cultural home, the betrayal of his parents), he still has that feeling of mud on his eyes, the coolness of water of from pool, the first experience of color.

He still has his one thing.

So do we.

I believe we all have "one thing" moments – those experiences or encounters that changed us. Those moments in our life when something happened -- we saw something, we felt something, we heard something, we accomplished something that changed us and made life taste differently. Moments when we were led into a new way, a new path, a new trajectory in life.

Last week, the St. Stephens St. Agnes hockey team went on this incredible run to end their season (two of our youth, Stephen Upton and Briggs Davis are on the team). Three times in a row, they were big underdogs against higher ranked teams that had beaten them handily in the regular season. Three times in a row, they won, and reached the playoffs for the first time in school history.

For each of the kids on this team, no matter what life throws at them, they're always going to remember when the final buzzer sounded and they mobbed their goalie in joyful celebration of their own miracle on ice.

They're never going to forget the moment when they saw that the impossible can happen when hard work and teamwork meet.

One thing...

A little while back, I called the daughter of a man who was about to die in the hospital. Because she lived out-of-state, there was no way she was going to see him before he died. When I asked her how she was, she said, "I'm pretty good, actually." And then she told me why.

That morning, when she was on her way to work and feeling overwhelmed, she looked up in the emerging light of the morning sky and saw an angel, enormous in the clouds with outstretched arms. She knew that this comforting sight was meant for her eyes to give her comfort and strength. The crowds can tell her it was the happenstance of cloud formations. She'll always know differently.

One thing...

You can't stop me. You can only hope to contain me! You came here with your questions...but I just want to talk about one thing!

As a 10 year old, I cried myself to sleep one night because my grandparents were going through a divorce, and I had not seen my Grandpa for a long time. I really missed being spoiled with quarters for the arcade...snacks for the car ride. Through my sniffles, I asked God that we might see him.

The next morning, I awoke to the sound of the phone ringing. When I groggily went to the breakfast table for my serving of cheerios, my Mom told me that Grandpa had called, and he was coming to see us, that day. To this day, I have not lost my belief that God answers prayers.

One thing...

Do I have to stop now? No, not yet? Then I'll tell you about David Bailey, the singer-songwriter who performed at Fairlington Presbyterian Church last Sunday night.

In his song, "Live Forever" David sings about the prognosis of Type IV brain cancer that gave him only 6 months to live, the incurable cancer that killed my father.

He sings,  
"The nurse told me the odds were stacked against me  
That maybe 1 in 500 could survive  
Wished me luck, then sadly told my family  
An ocean of drugs couldn't keep me alive

I clenched my teeth as I listened to her verdict  
All her years had only taught her how to run  
She forgot the truth behind her numbers:  
If there's one chance in 500,  
Then somebody's gotta be the one."

He was the one. He's lived for over 11 years and has been singing about -- please forgive me -- the "audacity of hope" ever since. (Since I just used an Obama mantra, I'll compensate by saying that from "Day 1," David Bailey has been the singer with the most experience to sing skillfully about hope.)

One thing...

What is yours? What is the moment that you can return to, again and again, to give you hope, to give you strength, or faith, or to remind you of the joy that is possible for you? To remind you that God is here?

I know that this is not easy, especially when there is one thing that you most want or need, but don't have.

I know that there are a lot of things that we could be, or perhaps *should* be considering in light of this text.

I know that we should be realistic, not overly-sentimental.

But, let us know this. That Jesus spat on the ground, made mud with his saliva, and spread mud on a blind man's eyes, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" which means "Sent."

Then the man went, and he washed, and he received his sight. And came to believe in the One whom others could not see.

One thing:

- The trembling in your heart when you held your child for the first time.
- The time you made it through, when you thought it would kill you
- The hymn that brought you home

One thing. Maybe that's what you're looking for.

Amen.