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Rev. Anne M. Rosebrock

MERIDIAN STREET UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

525,600 Minutes

Romans 12: 9-13

Now you know that Meridian Street is in ministry in a multitude of ways in this community as well as in far off places, but I discovered a ministry this week about which I knew nothing. I was sitting out at the Pumpkin Patch when I watched a squirrel carefully make his way around the pumpkins, hop up on a little platform where the gourds and mini pumpkins are displayed and remove a corn husk. The husk actually has a cob of dry corn on it making it cumbersome, so the squirrel had to take his time getting it out of the pumpkin patch and back to his nest. He kept an eye on me to make sure that I was not going to interfere, but he seemed to have a sense that he was welcome to the corn husk and you have to agree, if a squirrel can't borrow a corn husk from the church, well, what would the world be coming to? I have a sense that this was not his first time in the pumpkin patch and before I left, he was on his way back into the patch with a squirrel friend for another husk. I feel certain this community outreach creates a stress on pumpkin patch profits, but you can imagine what a great reputation we have in the local squirrel community.

On this day, with you I celebrate life, love, and the outreach of the pumpkin patch in all its many forms.

Let us pray!

I received this card in the mail this week. Yes, I confess that I have not turned in my pledge card for the support of the mission and ministry of Meridian Street for the year 2007. I fear that I may not be alone. So, this week, I got the reminder card. It is of course, my intent to make my pledge, it is my intent to support my community of faith, but as it is with all intentions, until I actually do the deed, complete the action, accomplish the task, intentions, themselves, are of little use.

We gather as a Christian community of faith. It is our intention to live out our mission statement – living a faith for today in fellowship and service. Intentions are all well and good as long as we actually follow through with concrete action.

I am not a mathematical wizard, but I have calculated the number of minutes that we have to live each year – well approximately, I am not sure what to do with daylight savings time. Actually, it did not occur to me to make this calculation until I heard the song from the musical RENT entitled, “Seasons of Love.” I did however check the calculation and yes, 60 minutes in an hour times 24 hours in a day times 365 days in a year equals – 525,600 minutes. And the older one gets the more dear those minutes seem.

We all have good intentions about the ways we plan to live out our minutes. The question is “How have we turned our intentions into actions?”

The majority of reading that I have done in the last decade is in the area of leadership. I am fascinated by the qualities of effective leaders and continue to try to improve my leadership skills. It was leadership guru, Steven Covey, who wrote, “The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.” The phrase lacks a sense of rhythm and poetry, but it speaks volumes all the same.

What is the main thing? We define the main thing in the living of our days, not by the way we intend to live, but by our actual words and actions. If you were to be described by your words and actions, what would be said about you?

In part the struggle is finding out what the main thing is in life. Is it family? Friends? Work? Travel? Education? Faith? What is the main thing in your life? It is a question that strikes at the heart of our very existence. Until we identify the main thing, we have no real hope of actually placing the main thing at the center of our living.

What is the main thing in your life? Not what you intend it to be, but what is it as defined by your words, your actions, your effort. If upon reflection the main thing in your life is not what you want it to be, take heart this is a perfect time to chart a new course for the next 525,600 minutes of your year.

The apostle Paul expands on the teaching of Jesus concerning loving God, self and neighbor and has given us a formula, if you will, to direct our steps and influence our life choices. He writes, “Love must be sincere.” Love is at the heart of all we do. Love God, love self and love others. Love is meant to soften our hearts and shape our words. Love is generated by God, embodied by us and made visible by our living. “Love must be sincere.” Paul goes on to say, “Never lacking in zeal, keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.” Though we are very suspect of the zealot these days, we are all invited to spiritual zeal, an overwhelming zest for living in and sharing with others the love of the Divine. “Keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.” Living out our 525,600 minutes in a way that honors God is the main thing. Sure there will be plenty of time to sleep, but our play and our work and our time with family and friends gives us the bulk of our minutes to serve our God - to walk as disciples of Jesus. This day and every day is a gift and we are encouraged to live out our faith as we practice joy in hope, patience in affliction, faithfulness in prayer and hospitality at all times.

The main thing, fellow pilgrims in the faith, is living out our faith as we serve our God. The main thing is walking as a disciple of Christ. And though we will never all be at the same place on the path of faith at the same time, we are all called to take our next step on that path. Discipleship is not suddenly and eternally being the perfect follower of the radical Jesus. Discipleship is being ever ready to examine one’s journey of faith and then take the next step in that journey.

We have 525,600 minutes to live in a year. Many of us live out each of those minutes with the intention of keeping the main thing the main thing, but never really getting to the main thing at all.

I heard this information about Americans just this week. We drink over 153,000 pounds of Starbucks coffee a day. This does not factor in all the other brands of coffee consumed in this country. To make matters worse, Americans eat 500,000 Twinkies a day. To add to our day, Americans watch, on average, 8 hours of television a day. When we are not watching television, the households that have internet spend an average of three hours surfing the internet. Thirty-one percent of the US population who use the internet frequently spend 70 minutes less interacting with family and 25 minutes less of sleeping a day. In a study recently published by Rutgers' Management Education Center, 75% of the 4,500 High School Students surveyed admitted that they engage in serious cheating. "Cheating is a shortcut and it's a pretty efficient one in a lot of cases," according to one of the 17 year olds interviewed in the survey. The main thing in American life appears to include caffeine, sugar, watching television, internet surfing and getting ahead by cheating. Not much there to inspire our living.

Parents – there is no greater achievement in your life than teaching about your faith to your children. It cannot be a mere intention, but must be a disciplined habit that is discussed and lived out in the life of your family. Grandparents, uncles, aunts--there is no greater gift that you can give a child than sharing on a regular basis why you are a person of faith and assist that child in discovering their own faith journey. Because there will come a day for all of us, when our faith will be the only thing that we have to hold. There will come a day when all of us will be defined, not by our intentions, but our actions.

The main thing is now and will always be – living out our faith. We keep the main thing the main thing as we order our lives around the principles of our faith. We keep the main thing the main thing as we move from good intentions to sculpting our words and actions in the love of God. We keep the main thing the main thing as we live a life where love is sincere and we exude fervor for serving the Lord.

525,600 minutes are the gift to us each year. We all know that they can fly by as we watch television or surf the internet. In this community of faith, we prepare now for next year. We make plans now for how we will live as a community of faith in the new year. We are expected to pray, to worship, to serve, to participate and to support this congregation spiritually and financially. More than that, we are called to be a powerful force for the love of God in this community and in the world. I am confident that we all have the best of intentions as we look forward to next year. I also know that we can be lulled by our intentions and never actually take the next step in discipleship as individuals and as a faith community.

I got this card in the mail this week. It is a reminder about getting in my pledge card. What I write on this card matters to this community of faith. What you write on your card matters to this faith community. It will be my intention and then become my commitment. It is not difficult for me to figure out the amount. I merely take the amount of salary I am paid for the year and multiply it by 10%. Stellar math skills not needed. By turning in the card, I am making a commitment to you. Not because I am clergy, not because I am paid to be at Meridian Street,

but because I am connected soul to soul with each one of you as we journey in faith together. Just like you, I am preparing to take my next step in discipleship. I do so knowing that I am not alone, but am surrounded by the love of God and by faithful followers of Christ.

Be assured, there will be days when I have television on and I am surfing the internet, enjoying a cup of Starbucks and a Twinkie. But when it is all said and done, I do not want to be defined by these actions. No, just like you, I want to be defined as a child of God.

525,600 minutes are the gift you and I are given each year. May this be a season of love where we not only declare our intentions, but then live out our faith as the main thing.

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