



***Theme: Are You Restless?***  
***"Restlessness: Reframed"***

Sermon preached by Aaron Strietzel

November 7-8, 2020

**Scripture: Mark 10:35-45**

**Weekly Memory Verse:**

**"Whoever wants to be great among you will be your servant. Whoever wants to be first among you will be the slave of all, for the Human One didn't come to be served but rather to serve and to give his life to liberate many people." - Mark 10:43b-45**

Mark 10:35-45; Matthew 6:19-21; Philippians 2:1-7

**VIDEO      Sermon Intro**

**SLIDE      "Restlessness: Reframed"**

Good morning, my name is Aaron Strietzel and I work at Summit Church as the pastor for our Three Springs Campus.

For those who may not know, this year we began to launch a new campus of Summit Church in Three Springs by prayerfully discerning what God was doing in the lives of the people in and around Three Springs and how we could participate in that work. While we started a house church in October, we continue to prayerfully discern other steps that we can take that will help us

live into our mission to

**Slide                      Build Community, Change Lives, and Bring Hope**

A couple of our big goals of 2021 is to form a network of house churches, as well as a core leadership team of at least 9 people. We are looking for people who believe in our mission and who have a desire to create a safe and brave space for dechurch and unchurched folks to ask hard questions, wrestle with faith, and grow together while serving our community.

- If you're interested - if something I say today speaks to you - and you might like to explore more what it might mean to be a part of what we believe God is doing, please email me at [aaron@summitdurango.org](mailto:aaron@summitdurango.org)

We begin our house church gatherings with a series of questions, because we believe faith is more about the journey than the destination, thus faith is about engaging in questions and exploring and uncovering the divine in all kinds of places and people than it is about having all the answers. Hopefully it is ok, but I would like to begin our time this morning by reading through the questions that we begin our gathering times together:

**Slide                      What if faith is found in the midst of the questions, not the answers?**

**What if the invitation is participating in the creation of a more just, sustainable world, not escaping it?**

**What if Jesus came to invite us into a larger story that is shaping everything, not just a belief system?**

**What if God is weaving together all the broken pieces in our lives to create something beautiful?**

**What if the Spirit is already working in everyone and everything, and our job is simply to become more aware of it?**

**What if our story begins with human goodness and flourishing?  
What if we lived every day as if all of this was true?**

Well that just might bring change to our world! Can you imagine it?

Today we continue on our sermon series on restlessness.

During this past week, how many of you have felt like this?

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We've just gone through a contentious election season amidst a global pandemic and what we have learned is that our country is still extremely divided.

Today's sermon title is Restlessness: Reframed.

I hope that no matter what emotions you are feeling today, that this sermon will speak to you, comfort you, and challenge you in some way.

As I thought about the idea of restlessness, I was reminded of a response the Dalai Lama gave when he was asked what surprised him most about people. He replied

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**"Man sacrifices his health in order to make money. Then he sacrifices money to recuperate his health. And then he is so anxious about the future that he does not enjoy the present, the result being that he does not live in the present or the future; he lives as if he is never going to die, and then dies having never**

**really lived.”**

**- Dalai Lama**

We sacrifice to accumulate more only to realize that often we sacrifice the most important things in our lives to accumulate things that don't have lasting value.

The election, our countries economy, and COVID have most likely made us even more aware and even invited us to rethink what is important and what really has lasting value especially as people of faith. Jesus said it this way:

**Scripture <sup>19</sup> “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; <sup>20</sup> but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal.  
Matthew 6:19-20**

I think Jesus knew the truth that when we seek to accumulate things that are temporary, they will only bring temporary fulfillment, which will lead to a sense of us wanting more.

If I'm being honest – and usually when you're a pastor preaching a sermon you try not to lie – I struggle with restlessness and discontent more than most. Restlessness is an ongoing struggle, perhaps my greatest most consistent struggle, so when I speak today, I speak as one struggling, wrestling, in the midst of the questions.

My restlessness has led me into some deeper struggles, at times with mild depression. Discontent and restlessness has led me to some seasons of darkness and struggle where I've felt confused, lost, uncertain as I wrestle with an ache in my heart for something more.

One of those seasons led me to find a spiritual director. Now, I was raised



in the church but I had never heard of a spiritual director until this season. Several of my seminary professors had talked about a spiritual direction and I heard the word from a few colleagues as well. Finding a spiritual director turned out to be an important and meaningful decision.

The title Spiritual Director is misleading, since they don't really "direct" your life as much as they do listen to your story, and questions, and share some different ways of looking at a situation from outside of your life. Perhaps "sacred listening" or "soul guide" or "soul friend" might be better titles.

I recently met with a Spiritual Director and was sharing my angst, questions and struggles. The more I talked the more it became clear to me that restlessness permeated my life. I didn't know why, and I was struggling to figure it out. My spiritual director turned to me and asked me a simple, yet deeply profound question. She said, "What would it look like for you to see your restlessness as a gift?"

A gift?

These are the kinds of questions that spiritual directors are great at asking. Instead of a simple answer, they often ask questions that help you reframe your struggle...kind of reminds me of the way Jesus often asked questions.

- How do I reframe my restlessness to see it as a gift?
- What does that look like?

This past Tuesday was election day. As I mentioned before what we realized is that our country continues to be divided almost exactly down the middle.

I know we have people in our congregation on both sides of the isle. This week has left some of you are excited and thankful, while others frustrated and grieving.

Some of you feel like you won, and some of you feel like you lost. For those of you who didn't get their candidate elected, it's a struggle.

None of us like to lose. We all like to win.

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A few days ago our family gathered around the dinner table and while we ate together we played one of the most classic board games there ever has been – Monopoly.

- Any Monopoly fans here?

It was an intense game. The last two of us standing were myself and our oldest son Micah. Micah had far more property and houses than I did, but I owned Park Place and Boardwalk and had four houses on both.

Unfortunately for Micah, he rolled and landed on Boardwalk “\$1700 please” I said with a smile! I thought I had won, but it turned out that he had enough to pay me so we continued. We duked it out, but on one go around I landed on several of his properties and eventually went bankrupt.

As a parent (honest confession here) it was bittersweet because I was proud of my son, but I lost and I don’t enjoy losing, especially when I was so close to winning!

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I pastored a church in the Phoenix area and one year we decided to start a co-ed softball team. We entered in the lowest league as many of our players hadn't played before or hadn't played for some time so we thought that way we could at least win some.

Not only did we suffer through playing in 110-degree weather, we went an entire season without winning one game! Here's what I learned from that season:

- 110 degrees is hot, even after the sun goes down
- Loosing is hard
- Loosing every game is demoralizing and crushing.

We all want to win. It's in our nature yet Jesus reframes what it means to win. In the gospel of Mark 10:35-45 we read about a story where two people so desire to win.

**Scripture**      <sup>35</sup> James and John, Zebedee's sons, came to Jesus and said, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask."  
<sup>36</sup> "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.  
<sup>37</sup> They said, "Allow one of us to sit on your right and the other on your left when you enter your glory."  
<sup>38</sup> Jesus replied, "You don't know what you're asking! Can

**you drink the cup I drink or receive the baptism I receive?”**

**<sup>39</sup> “We can,” they answered.**

**Jesus said, “You will drink the cup I drink and receive the baptism I receive, <sup>40</sup> but to sit at my right or left hand isn’t mine to give. It belongs to those for whom it has been prepared.”**

**<sup>41</sup> Now when the other ten disciples heard about this, they became angry with James and John. <sup>42</sup> Jesus called them over and said, “You know that the ones who are considered the rulers by the Gentiles show off their authority over them and their high-ranking officials order them around. <sup>43</sup> But that’s not the way it will be with you. Whoever wants to be great among you will be your servant. <sup>44</sup> Whoever wants to be first among you will be the slave of all, <sup>45</sup> for the Human One didn’t come to be served but rather to serve and to give his life to liberate many people.”**

Whenever I read this text I just picture being the one who walked up to Jesus and asked to be the greatest. What were the other disciples saying afterward? I’m sure James and John received a fair amount of shade after this!

In this story, Jesus reframes what it means to win. He reframes what it means to be great.

As Pastor Jeff has said recently, Jesus came to present an “upside down kingdom.” In other words, a different way of being human. A different way of living that wasn’t focused on personal greatness, but on communal greatness, where we put the needs of others before our own individual desires.

The more I read Jesus, the more it seems to me that we tend to make Jesus’s teaching into a system of belief and then argue about our beliefs. Instead, Jesus lived into a new paradigm, a fundamentally different way of

being human.

We read about this different paradigm in Paul's letter to Philippi when he writes:

**Scripture**      If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, <sup>2</sup> make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. <sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

<sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,

<sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,

<sup>8</sup> he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

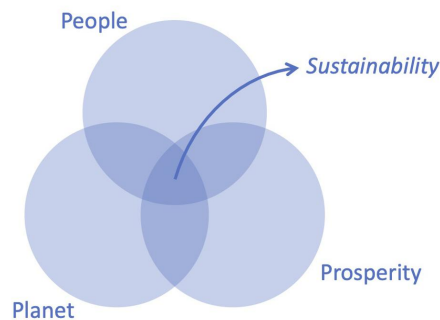
### **Philippians 2:1-8**

Ok, so we've all read this passage before. It's nice and sweet but what does it look like lived out in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

Let's look at business as an example. One way of looking at success in the business world is through profit. If you make money, your business is a success.

But the way of Jesus should ask us to look at this differently.

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A better approach, and one that continues to become increasingly popular, is what some have called “the 3P approach”:

1. People
2. Planet
3. Prosperity (Profit)

Wanting to start a business, make money, be successful...these aren't evil desires. But how we put those desires into action matters.

If our focus becomes solely or primarily about prosperity (profit) we are then willing to overlook people or the planet in order to make a profit.

- By the way it's this very thinking that has led to the environmental crisis that we now face.
  - And I really do believe that at the core of the environmental crisis is a spiritual struggle – how do we move beyond “me” (personal profit) to thinking about “we?” (other people and the planet)

The church is called to embody the way of Jesus in the world. That's why we are here, to be Jesus Christ to the world. If we are to embody the way of Jesus, and Jesus calls us to reframe what it means to win and what it means to be the best, then we should highlight and lift up stories of people who live into that shouldn't we? Let's be honest and just say that sometimes serving others is something we need to practice and sometimes we need inspiration to help gather our energy and focus to make this a priority.

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I can't think of a person, other than Jesus, who embodies what it looks like to serve more than Giovanni Francesco Bernardone, who is more popularly known today as St Francis of Assisi.

Recently, I think it's because there has been so much uncertainty and confusion during this past year, I've found myself drawn to ancient prayers and saints. I think perhaps because I feel more grounded, but also because I feel more challenged as I confront my paradigm which has often been more shaped by a westernized view of Christianity than by Jesus himself.

It seems easy to be a Christian and in 21<sup>st</sup> century America and yet still strive to win while others lose, still strive to be the best while we put others last, still start business that focus solely on profit while neglecting other people and the planet.

St Francis was born in 1181 into a wealthy family. His father moved to Assisi to become a merchant. He was successful enough to provide a decent life for his family. St Francis had many friends from wealthy and even Noble families. As a youth was known for his generosity, but also for vanity and tendencies to overindulge and party.

He left home to fight in a war with dreams of military glory. He was captured and imprisoned for over a year before his release. During his journey home, struggling internally with illness and most likely all that he had experienced in war and imprisonment, he came upon an old church outside of Assisi. Legend has it he heard a voice saying:

- “Francis, go repair my house, which, as you can see, is falling completely to ruin.”

Though he was generous as a youth and would often give money to those in need, he despised persons with any form of deformity, especially those with leprosy. It was somewhat ironic then that he found himself living and serving among local lepers, for it was there, as one author writes:

**Slide      “There he [St Francis] became aware of such a powerful divine presence that the once-distant God became for him tangibly present.”**  
**- Francis of Assisi: A New Biography**

The thing that he once most despised became an avenue for his own salvation.

- Once restless for temporary things - selfish ambition and vanity - St Francis now became restless for the things of God.

St Francis never set out to create a movement, and while he resisted leadership people were drawn to him and the way he lived his life. One author reflects upon this by writing the following:



**Slide**      **“Just as Francis never proposed a social reform program, so he never presented a religious one. His authority came from his submission to God, and his greatest sermon was always his own life...Francis always preached more by example than by words.”**  
**- Francis of Assisi: A New Biography**

A common quote often attributed to St Francis is: “Preach the Gospel. When necessary use words.” Pope Francis reflects on the life of St Francis, which I find timely for us today:

*He is the patron saint of all who study and work in the area of ecology, and he is also much loved by non-Christians. He was particularly concerned for God’s creation and for the poor and outcast. He loved, and was deeply loved for his joy, his generous self-giving, his openheartedness. He was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature, and with himself. He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace.<sup>1</sup>*

Though he lived many years ago, I find the life of St Francis, his actions, his generosity, his commitment to simplicity and his deep connection to God and creation, stirs a restlessness within me and begs the question:

- What am I restless for?

One of the things I find most compelling about St Francis is that following Christ was not just about a system of beliefs, but about a way of life which he took to heart. Some have called him “the last Christian” because of the way he embodied the life of Jesus. My Spiritual Director asked me what it would look

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpted from Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’: On Care For Our Common Home* (Our Sunday Visitor: 2015), paragraphs 11–13. The full text of this encyclical is available at <http://www.vatican.va>

like to see my restlessness as a gift.

A gift?

- How do I reframe my restlessness to see it as a gift?
- What does that look like?

Perhaps Jesus helps us understand when he says

**Scripture**      <sup>19</sup> **“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; <sup>20</sup> but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:19-21**

Jesus didn't say “don't store up treasures,” rather he tells us that where we store our treasures, where we put out time, energy, and money, will determine where our heart is. Perhaps the question isn't “Am I restless?” But rather “What am I restless for?” This is why I think we don't so much *have* faith as much as we *practice* our faith. The thinking that we *have* faith suggests that it's a one time, done deal. Like turning on a light switch. When in reality faith is something we practice and grow into.

- We practice our faith when we gather together (in person or online) to worship to remind ourselves who God is and who we are.
- We practice our faith when we give of our time and resources, not because God needs it, but because when we do learn to be more generous.
- We practice our faith when we pray because when we pray we open ourselves up to discover God in new ways.

- We practice our faith when we serve, because it reminds us that the world doesn't revolve around us.

When we practice our faith, it moves our focus from “me” to “we.” It shifts our restlessness from temporary things – like a house, a car, the next promotion, or the next presidential election – to things that last – like helping other people and the planet while we seek the prosperity of all.

- How are you practicing your faith?
- How might you be invited to practice your faith in new or deeper ways?

May we learn from the life of Jesus and St Francis, and may we become increasingly restless for Gods kingdom to come to earth.

I would like to transition back into song by inviting you to read along with me a timely prayer attributed to St Francis that reminds us what it looks like to be restless for God's kingdom during a time of uncertainty, angst, and liminality. Let us pray,

**Slide                    Lord, make me an instrument of your peace  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love  
Where there is injury, pardon  
Where there is doubt, faith  
Where there is despair, hope  
Where there is darkness, light  
And where there is sadness, joy  
O Divine Master, grant that I may  
Not so much seek to be consoled as to console  
To be understood, as to understand  
To be loved, as to love  
For it is in giving that we receive  
And it's in pardoning that we are pardoned  
And it's in dying that we are born to Eternal Life  
Amen**