

# FOR ME TO LIVE IS CHRIST – COMMITMENT SUNDAY

## Cross of Glory Evangelical Lutheran Church

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### A Life with Purpose

#### Philippians 1:20-27

I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.<sup>21</sup> For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.<sup>22</sup> If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know!<sup>23</sup> I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far;<sup>24</sup> but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.<sup>25</sup> Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith,<sup>26</sup> so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.<sup>27</sup> Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel.

Imagine a ship drifting at sea or a driver without a map. Many drift through life without direction or purpose. Drifting takes us where the wind blows us – off course. A heathen culture becomes the wind. Each of us should face the questions: “Why am I still alive?” “For what purpose am I living my life?” Is it possible that some of us are just drifting? In our reading today, we see the words of a man who has found purpose and direction for his life. As we look at these words from the Paul’s letter to the Philippians I pray that God will lead each of us to the same conclusion: For Me to Live is Christ.

The book of Philippians is known as one of the four prison epistles. It was written while Paul was imprisoned in Rome based on the accusation that he was stirring up trouble with his preaching about Christ. Paul had been imprisoned for a number of years by the time he wrote this letter to the congregation at Philippi. You can be certain that while he was imprisoned, he had much time to think and ask himself some of those deeper questions of life: Why am I here? What is my life all about? Asking those questions did not lead Paul to despair or self-pity due to his imprisonment. In fact, it was just the opposite. As a result of his imprisonment, the apostle Paul was filled with even greater hope and joy. He had such joy because he knew that even in prison he could accomplish his life’s true purpose: to bring glory to Christ. As he writes in the first verse of our reading: “*I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.*” Paul’s single mission in life was to exalt Christ—bring glory to his Savior.

It was not always that way for Paul. We know that earlier in his life, his mission was just the opposite. He was hell-bent on bringing down Christ. He lived not for Christ, but for the empty traditions handed down to him. He had zeal and purpose in life, but it was completely misplaced. If he had continued down that path, he would never have known the hope and joy that he was now experience while in prison in Rome.

The question we need to ask ourselves today is this: for whom and for what purpose am I living? We know that the proper response is the one found in our reading: for me to live is Christ. But is that how we always act? Or do we sometimes act as though life is all about something or someone else? By nature, we are inherently selfish. The most natural response to that question “For whom am I living?” is “For old #1—me!” It’s easy to let selfishness guide the decisions we make in life. What will make me happy? What do I think is the best thing to do? The problem is this: living for oneself is not a life that is headed for true joy and contentment. It’s a life that is headed for regret and unhappiness. There has to be more to life than just trying to please your own selfish desires.

The apostle Paul found the “more to life” while he was on the road to Damascus. That is where the Lord knocked him flat on his back and showed him the folly of the life that he was living. This Jesus against whom he had been fighting was the world’s Redeemer and his Savior from sin. From that day forward, Paul’s life would never be the same. He would no longer live for what seemed right to himself at the time. He would live for Christ and what was right according to his Word. His life was dedicated to following Christ and lifting up his name to the world.

We see this kind of dedication in the words of our reading, written from his imprisonment. He was only concerned about bringing glory to Christ. He knew this could happen in one of two ways—by his life or by his death. And he would be content with either one. As he wrote: “*For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.*”<sup>22</sup> *If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know!*<sup>23</sup> *I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far;*<sup>24</sup> *but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.*<sup>25</sup> *Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith,*<sup>26</sup> *so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.*” Paul knew that the best thing possible for him would be that he die a martyr’s death and go to be with his Savior Jesus. But he also knew that it would be a blessing for the Christians at Philippi and other places around the world that he live and work to spread the gospel message among them. It seems as though this is what actually happened. Paul was not sentenced to death this time, but given further opportunity to work and spread the gospel message even further throughout the world.

It is certainly inspiring to read the words of a truly dedicated servant of the Lord. Paul could not only say, “For me to live is Christ,” but also back it up with his life’s work. How are we able to gain such a high level of dedication and zeal for serving Jesus? It all begins with the gospel message itself. It begins when we open our eyes to see just how much Christ means to each and every one of us. What would your life be without Christ? You would have no forgiveness for sins. You would be left to face the full punishment for every wrong you commit all on your own. Even the momentary joy you might experience in this life would not be able to cover up the underlying fear of what awaited you at the final judgment. Life without Christ would be no life at all.

But with Christ, everything changes. Fear of death changes to the hope of eternal life. Slave to sin changes to freedom from guilt and shame. The world’s most cruel master—the devil is exchanged for the world’s most loving owner—the Lord. When we begin to appreciate what tremendous blessings are ours through Christ, how could we not set as our life’s goal to lift up his name to the world and give him glory? How could we not worship him in joy and say without

any doubt: for me to live is Christ? The gospel message is what gives your life its meaning and purpose.

The closing encouragement from our reading are the words I would like you to take some time thinking about today. The apostle Paul advises the Christians at Philippi and each of us saying: “*Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.*” That is really not a bad goal for our lives: to live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. And what does that mean? As we saw before, the gospel of Christ means everything to us. To conduct yourself in a manner worthy of this gospel means to show the world the tremendous value of the gospel in everything we do or say. It means total dedication to Christ and to his calling. For the past month, we have seen the different ways in which we are able to glorify Christ by living out our Christian calling. We saw how every task we carry out in life can be a task lived for the Lord. We saw how every relationship we have in life can be an opportunity to share Christ’s love. We saw how every resource the Lord has placed in our hands can be put to use for the good of his kingdom.

Now let today be a day of dedication. Let us say along with Joshua in our first reading: “As for me and my family, we will serve the Lord.” Living a life worthy of the calling we have received is not always easy. There will be setbacks along the way. We are still sinful human beings. We will need the assurance of Christ’s forgiveness often if we are going to make it. That is the beauty of the gospel message. It continually speaks peace to our hearts and refreshes our spirit. There can be no greater purpose to life than to keep this gospel message at the forefront of everything we do. A life lived for Christ is a life filled with purpose and meaning and it is a life that looks forward to an eternity of joy at the Savior’s side. May we take the Spirit’s words to heart this morning and make the apostle’s Paul motto our very own: For me to live is Christ and to die is gain. **Amen.**

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Sermon No. 240  
October 4, 2009  
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