

SERMON NOTES – 10/04/26

THE STORY OF YOUR LIFE – ‘An Objective’

Exodus 3:7-12

Big Idea

Every good story needs a character who **wants something**. Our objectives and ambitions give direction to the stories we live—but not every objective leads to a meaningful story. God invites us beyond lives centered primarily on comfort, security, and possessions into a larger story that involves **purpose, risk, sacrifice, and service to others**.

Something Has to Get the Story Moving

- Characters—and people—generally resist change. We naturally gravitate toward comfort, stability, and what is familiar.
- A story begins when something disrupts that comfortable existence and forces the character to respond.
- Storytellers call this disruption the **inciting incident**: an event that upsets life’s balance and propels the character into the story.
- Luke Skywalker’s life changes when the Empire kills his aunt and uncle. Suddenly, joining Obi-Wan and becoming a Jedi isn’t simply a distant dream—it becomes his objective.
- Our own lives also contain moments that disrupt what is familiar and invite us to consider a different future.

What Do You Want?

- Once an inciting incident disrupts the character’s life, the character develops an **object of desire**—something they believe is missing and begin pursuing.
- That desire becomes the character’s **objective or ambition** and gives the story somewhere to go.
- What we choose to pursue matters because **what a character wants helps determine the quality of the story**.
- God invites us toward objectives that produce meaningful, life-giving stories rather than lives composed of disconnected or meaningless scenes.

Who Is Choosing Your Objectives?

- Our culture constantly offers us objects of desire and then encourages us to build our lives around pursuing them.
- Advertising works by disrupting our contentment: something we were perfectly satisfied with yesterday suddenly seems inadequate when we’re shown something newer or better.

- The television we once loved becomes disappointing after seeing the enormous new OLED television at the store. We pursue it, acquire it, enjoy it—and eventually another object takes its place.
- There is nothing inherently wrong with televisions, cars, phones, or other possessions. The danger comes when these pursuits become the stories around which we organize our lives.
- Every life has objects of desire. The important question is: **Who chose yours?**

Moses Gets a New Objective

- Moses has settled into a comfortable and predictable life as a shepherd in Midian when God disrupts his story through the burning bush.
- God has heard the cries of the Hebrew people suffering under slavery in Egypt and intends to deliver them.
- Then God gives Moses an extraordinary objective: **“I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.”**
- Moses is invited to become part of something far larger than himself—the liberation of an entire people from bondage.
- His new ambition is not primarily about what Moses can acquire for himself. It is about participating in **God’s work of salvation for others.**

“Please Send Someone Else”

- Moses isn’t thrilled about the new story God has offered him. He responds with excuse after excuse:
 - **“Who am I?”**
 - **“What if they ask your name?”**
 - **“They won’t believe me.”**
 - **“I’m not a good speaker.”**
 - And finally: **“Please send someone else.”**
- Each time Moses objects, God provides what he needs: God’s presence, God’s name, signs of God’s power, words to speak, and eventually the assistance of Aaron.
- Moses’ resistance reveals something deeply human: even when we know a new direction may be worthwhile, fear can make the familiar story remarkably attractive.
- Eventually Moses reluctantly says yes and begins moving into the story God has placed before him.

Great Stories Require Risk

- Any story worth living involves some degree of **risk**.
- Robert McKee suggests asking what will be lost if a character fails to achieve the objective. If nothing meaningful is at stake, there isn’t much of a story.
- Moses has plenty at stake. He must return to the country he fled, confront the most powerful ruler in the region, and demand freedom for an enslaved people.
- Fear is real, particularly when our lives are changing. But God’s repeated message throughout Scripture is **“Do not fear.”**

- God's promise isn't that following God's call will always be safe. It is that **God will be with us.**

It's Never Too Late for a Better Story

- We can easily assume that meaningful new objectives belong primarily to younger people.
- But our age does not determine whether God still has meaningful work for us to do.
- Reflecting on biographies of Benjamin Franklin, author Jim Collins observed how much of Franklin's significant and creative work occurred after age sixty.
- Whatever our age or stage of life, there can still be new chapters, new objectives, and meaningful contributions ahead.
- **No matter our age, we can choose to live a good story.**

From a Good Story to an Epic Story

- Donald Miller discovered that once he began intentionally living better stories, he wanted to pursue stories with even greater meaning.
- His filmmaking friends suggested two characteristics that transform a good story into an **epic** one:
 - The objective is **difficult to achieve**—something significant is genuinely at risk.
 - The objective is **sacrificial**—the character takes that risk for the sake of someone else.
- Moses' story contains both. Liberating Israel from Pharaoh will be extraordinarily difficult and dangerous, and Moses undertakes it for the freedom of others.
- Some of life's greatest stories are therefore not built around what we can obtain, but around **what we are willing to risk or give for someone else.**

An Objective for Our Church

- These questions apply not only to individuals but also to communities of faith.
- Market Street UMC is currently living through its own moment of change and discernment.
- Of the 55 people who responded about the congregation's way forward, **93% identified joining with the Presbyterians as their first choice** for the near-term future.
- A combined worship service is planned for All Saints Sunday as an opportunity to experience worship together, with November 29—the first Sunday of Advent—targeted for the move to regular worship in Mabank.
- Like Moses, a congregation can choose simply to preserve what is comfortable and familiar—or discern where God may be inviting it into a new story with greater purpose.

What Are You Living For?

- Thomas Merton suggested that one of the most revealing questions we can ask is not where someone lives or what they enjoy, but **what they are living for**—and what prevents them from living fully for it.

- God invites us into a story larger than ourselves: a story involving life and death, love and grace, sacrifice and reward.
- That invitation can be frightening. Moses certainly thought so.
- But perhaps life can become something richer and more meaningful when we are willing to embrace God's invitation and take a few faithful risks.

Takeaway

Every one of us is already pursuing something. The question is whether our **objectives and ambitions are worthy of the lives we are spending on them**. God invited Moses away from the safety of Midian into the difficult, risky, and sacrificial work of setting others free. God continues to invite us—both individually and as a church—into a story larger than ourselves. Rather than allowing fear, comfort, or our culture to choose our objects of desire, we can ask: **What am I really living for? What might God be calling me toward? And what faithful risk might I need to take to get there?**

Sources Cited

Donlad Miller, A Million Miles in a Thousand Years

Robert McKee, STORY: Substance, Structure, Style and The Principles of Screenwriting

Jim Collins, What to Make of a Life

Gordon MacDonald, A Resilient Life