

“To Do Lists”

Rev. Christy E. Dew  
August 31, 2008  
Text: Romans 12:9-21

First Christian Church  
115 Courthouse Plaza  
Manhattan KS 66502

Today's sermon is called "To Do Lists". How many of you make them on a regular basis? Well I have mine with me this morning, and the first thing on mine is to say to the choir "**No funny business!**" \*(Laughter in the congregation.) This is the first time we have tried this arrangement, so your joy and your love projected? Wonderful! But no bunny ears.

This has been a wonderful year of first for me. Moving here in December, I'm not quite through the first year, yet. I came to the most horrendous ice storm, or set of them that I have ever experienced and I have lived in the mountains of NC where they are frequent. I have also experienced my first horrific tornado. I have seen them way off in the distance. I have heard about them being ten blocks from me, but I have never seen and experienced one like I experienced here. Now I will also tell you it's not about bad things. This is the first beautifully cool summer in my thirty-five years and I am grateful! (Amens from the congregation.) AMEN! How many of you are happy that August was not a series of 115 degree days? Exactly! And yesterday I got to experience something for the first time I have ever done? Does anyone know what it might have been? First Manhattan, K-State football game. \*(Applause from the congregation.) and I have a picture to prove it although not with me today. You may be wondering what a football game has to do with a sermon? Absolutely nothing. But it does have something to do with what I experienced yesterday and what I experienced when we are a part of community. I have never seen such a well oiled machine run like that. Everyone had a purpose. Everybody knew what their purpose was. Their purpose had been communicated effectively and most, if not all the time, it went off without a hitch. It was an amazingly beautiful thing to see and I'm not talking about what happened on the football field, because there were times when that was not a well oiled machine as they would have liked. I'm talking about all the support staff, all the people behind the scenes, everybody there working. Now you make think it was called controlled chaos. (Laughter) But I think Paul knew about controlling chaos. I think that is what many of us do on a regular basis. We're just trying, maybe to control what is going on in our lives. Maybe give a word of hope and encouragement so that we all are able to work together. That we become something from controlled chaos to a well oiled machine. Something from communities of brokenness into communities of God's hope and wholeness.

Now I have to admit that I love this book. It's a good thing for a pastor to do, to love a bible, don't you think? But like you, there are some scriptures to which I am absolutely drawn to. I shared this passage of scripture with those gathered for the all church Sunday School. And I was so excited that it came up in the lectionary AND that it came up at a time when I would get to preach it. But I want you to hear it differently. I want you to hear it a little differently from when Tanya read it so beautifully from the New Revised Standard Version. You don't have this version in the pew bible, it is from the Message. I am going to back up just a few verses. This is what Paul is talking about in community maybe for our time. Please hear a little differently the words of the Epistle from Romans.

(6-8) *If you preach, just preach God's Message, nothing else; if you help, just help, don't take over; if you teach, stick to your teaching; if you give encouraging guidance, be careful that you don't get bossy; I wonder if he was talking to any of us? if you're put in charge, don't manipulate; if you're called to give aid to people in distress, keep your eyes open and be quick to respond; if you work with the disadvantaged, don't let yourself get irritated with them or depressed by them. Keep a smile on your face.*

(8-10) *Love from the center of who you are; don't fake it. Run for dear life from evil; hold on for dear life to good. Be good friends who love deeply; practice playing second fiddle once in a while.*

(11-13) *Don't burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Don't quit in hard times for me this bears repeating **Don't quit in the hard times but; pray all the harder. Help needy Christians; be inventive in hospitality.***

(14-16) Now here's an interesting one. I saw this played out yesterday at the game. *Bless your enemies; no cursing under your breath. Or even booing out loud, I wonder. Laugh with your happy friends when they're happy; share tears when they're down. Get along with each other; don't be stuck-up. Make friends with nobodies; don't try to be the great somebody.*

(17-19) *Don't hit back; discover beauty in everyone. And part of this that speaks to me and everyone, It's a conditional one. If you've got it in you, some of us don't, get along with everybody. Don't insist on getting even; that's not for you to do. "I'll do the judging," says God. "I'll take care of it."*

*(20-21) Our Scriptures tell us that if you see your enemy hungry, go and buy that person lunch, or if he's thirsty, get him a drink. Your generosity will surprise him with goodness. Don't let evil get the best of you; get the best of evil by doing good. (from the Message Version of the Bible by Peterson)*

How many of you heard something different? (hands raised from the congregation and Pastor Christy looks at the choir) See they're on the spot now. I've got a captive audience. (laughter in the congregation) That's what we're supposed to do. We're supposed to hear the Gospel differently; envisioned through God's eyes and through God's hope, not through our own. We're supposed to listen to the Gospel message in what God has for us, not what we believe that it is. Now it moves us from what we ought to be. Maybe this is Paul's to do list for the community, but what happens when you're to do list is finished? We throw it away, right? Some of you might recycle it in the colored paper box or in the white recycling bin. Some of you tuck it away on a part of your desk, never to be seen again. But there is more than just having a "to do list" and completing it, because for me, this is when the rubber hits the road. This is when God's vision of community really comes to bear witness. Because we all have a purpose, right? We all have a God given purpose. Some of us have found it and claim it. Some of us are trying to discover it. Others of us are wandering and that's ok too. But what happens when our purposes bump up next to one another? What happens when we start to cross boundaries and it gets a little messy? Sometimes we get our feelings hurt. Sometimes we become confused. Sometimes we want to run away. There are times when fear sets in. We don't know really know what to do when we start bumping into each other. Now I like to think it's like bumper cars. We would all have a vision of life and we know what we are getting into, right? We've all chosen to get on this ride with each other. We know that it's supposed to be fun; we know that it's supposed to be a community. We know that we're supposed to get hit every once in a while and that's part of the journey. But most of us, are feeling a little like we're getting hit from behind. We're jarred; a little unsettled when it happens. That's when this scripture reminds us to pray all the harder. Don't quit in the hard times. That's part of the message. Community is messy. Being in community is messy. We rub up against each other. And sometimes when we do it, we have an arm that reaches out to steady us and grab hold of us. Other times when it happens, we fall down. But one of the things that happened this morning is that if we communicate our needs, openly, honestly, compassionately, the church responds. But not only does the church respond inside of these walls, but those who are waiting to hear the Gospel message outside of the doors, find something worthwhile to respond to. I don't know if you notice, but every week this message is recorded and broadcast over the radio. We have more than one audience. So for all of you who are listening at home sometime in the coming week, this message is also for you. There are things that we respond to. We are each called to be a part of community. And some of us do that with a great sense of courage and vulnerability.

All of you know what it's like to be in relationship with someone. I ask this question and if you choose to respond will you raise your hand? Have any of you ever been hurt by anybody? (Hands raised all over the congregation) When we live together, it gets messy; that's part of the journey. When we live together as a church, it's also part of our story. Peter got hurt this morning. He was sitting there with Jesus. Jesus was telling him that he was about to be hurt, and Peter said, God forbid this thing from ever happening. And Jesus said to him, being hurt is a part of our story. Not because we ordain that you must be hurt in order to participate, but that it's a natural part of living together. It's a natural part of living together...but the story doesn't stop there. We're not a people who believe in the tomb. We're not a people that stop at hurt and death and pain. When we have faith, we become a people who believe in resurrection; a people who believe in God's hope, that there is something more than this moment. We believe that at this table (the communion table) when Jesus says this is my body broken, it will also become hope everlasting. That we become a people who live into God's hope, who live into more than we could ever believe. That's what this journey is. That's where the destination is on our road map. There may be a few potholes. There may be a few wrong turns. There may be even several dead ends or a couple of crashes on our way. **But we believe we are going forward into God's hope, together.** And even though it's messy and might take a little while longer than we might have anticipated, just like the disciples. Getting there together, with God, is our journey. Amen.

\*The Chancel set up has been rearranged and the choir now sits behind the pulpit with the pastor's back facing the choir.

\*\*This congregation keeps attempting to turn me into a Wildcat fan. My veins will always run Duke blue, but I did buy my dog a Purple collar and I now own my first set of pompoms in Wildcat colors.