

# Christ the Lord Episcopal Church      Pinole CA

The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost      August 9, 2020

*“Keep Your Eyes on the Prize”*

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good Morning, I hope today finds you well. What a perfect Gospel for today, in so many ways. I have entitled today’s reflection “keep your eyes on the prize.” Now I have to give credit to Pete Seeger for coming up with that phrase, or should I say lyric. For Pete Seeger the prize was social and racial justice, which actually is part of keeping your eyes on the prize - which of course for Christians is Jesus and what he stood for. In fact, if you are interested in Black History in America, you can look up the television series entitled “Keep Your Eyes on the Prize” and enjoy the videos.

So, credit given where credit is due, however I want to go back further and deeper into the spiritual meaning of keeping your eye on the prize. This is what is truly going on for Peter, and just like Peter, we are often ones of little faith.

So like any type of spiritual discernment, you have to define exactly what it is you seek. What exactly is the prize? Well, there are many different factors here, and a lot depend on where you are on the life cycle. In my childhood, a Disney vacation may be the prize after having good grades, the teen years may have the prize of that romantic someone you long for, adulthood brings about the goals of family, career, home, roots, and then mid- to later-life, we prize our contributions to society, traveling, retirement... you fill in the blank.

And yes, all of these prizes are dependent on your socio-economic status as well. All of the aforementioned “so-called” prizes are material based, very corruptible, and all will eventually fade to dust – most probably in the landfill, and of course our lives on earth end – more dust. We need to focus on the long-term goal, the eternal prize.

For your soul, your spirit, the prize is much more than you can possibly imagine. For your soul, the prize is sharing love, being in community, and being in

communion with God. For your spirit the prize is taking the chaos of life and letting God turn it into a beautiful tapestry we can call life. For your soul, the end game is eternal life – to be in the presence of God. And there is work to be done to ensure that.

So still in our spiritual discernment phase, we have identified that the prize we are looking for is a balance between what we can manage on a physical/material side providing for at least our necessities, and growing in love, charity and hope on the spiritual side looking at that eternal goal.

Well, guess what? God's got this, and today's Gospel shows us in detail what it looks like, and you will be very surprised when you contemplate on this scripture to see just what a set-up we have as children of God.

Jesus made the disciples get into the boat to go to the other side. Notice that the disciples may not have wanted to go, as there is a kind of forcefulness to this statement he "made them get into the boat." Well, there we are. We can only go where God makes us go, and chances are it won't always be where we want to go, nor will there always be smooth sailing.

Then after putting the disciples in the boat and shipping them off, Jesus goes away alone to pray and commune with God the Father. Not to mock this scripture, but maybe to just "tell it like it is", the first thing I thought of when I read this was, yup, I get in the boat on some unknown adventure and God goes on holiday.

Maybe that is the point of this story. We are at times supposed to figure things out to the best of our ability. It doesn't mean God is on vacation – but as we see Jesus here- whether we picture Jesus praying as God, or as convening with God, Jesus is probably holding the disciples in prayer, planning for their next needs, and providing spiritual protection. Now to the disciples it may seem God is far away as the boat begins to get battered, but here again, Jesus is not far away, he comes to them. God is not as far away as it seems.

Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." Always, when God is working in our lives there are ways he comforts us because he knows life on earth can be hard. Do not be afraid.

Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” Oh yes, this applies to all of us who search for God. We often don’t just say, ok, I am here, we often have that little bit of ego in us that questions, if it is really you, prove it and then I will do what you ask. Notice that Peter is not the forward thinker here, he is waiting for Jesus to respond. And Jesus responds with “Come.” We pray and ask, and we are not given the prize, we are given the invitation to raise our eyes to the prize, and staring steadily at Jesus, move forward.

So there is Peter, eye on the prize, walking on water with his eyes, his mind, and his spirit focused on Jesus. He is a super hero, he can do more with his focus on Jesus than he can do as a simple human being.... But wait, there is distraction, the wind. Amidst the chaos around him, Peter, the only one thinking outside of the boat so to say, gets distracted. Eyes off the prize, and he falters. Eyes off of Jesus, eyes not focused on love, community, faith, hope and charity, eyes off of the prize and we begin feeling like God has abandoned us... we begin to sink into our own abyss. But just as this scripture reminds us, one call for help, and God is there. Jesus is there. We can again refocus, and then the chaos will calm, the battering to our little boat will stop, or at least become bearable.

So, how do we keep our eyes on the prize? How do we focus our lives on the standards that Jesus would have us live? Well, believe it or not your life is a performance. Like the saying goes, we are all players on a stage, so I consulted with one of the greatest groups of performers for their advice and I must say, it’s good advice. It reminds me of the song lyrics – “I hope you dance.”

The New York Radio City Rockettes have to learn their performances and work together. In order to do that they have come up with a mission that the whole performance team must learn. They call it “keeping our eyes on the prize” so here we go.

Number 1: **Stay personal** : Throughout the competition (or in our case life), focus on yourself. Now is not the time to worry about what your competitors or others are doing or not doing. Life should be fun. Enjoy being with your teammates.

Number 2: **Prepare:** The moments before you go on stage or to work or become involved in any project are important. Warm up for the mental challenges as well as the physical requirements with a pre-performance routine or meditation that relaxes you. Remember, your body language can send a message to others, but it also can send a message to your brain, stay positive.

Number 3: **Pay Attention:** Everyone experiences changes in their bodies right before a performance or tough life challenge. It's different for everyone. Be aware of the behavioral, physical, and mental shifts that usually happen within you. If you recognize these changes, you've taken the first step toward controlling them.

Number 4: **Perform:** When you've spent all day in a positive and focused frame of mind, the only thing left to do is to trust all the preparation and rehearsal you've already put in, and just dance, just live.

Keep your eyes on the prize. Hope, love, charity, community, spiritual connection with the Divine, these are the eternal prizes. This is the model of Jesus. What are you doing to nourish these things? What are you doing to see Jesus in every encounter? What is distracting you? Can you stay **personal, prepare, pay attention** and **perform/live, really live**? Can you learn to trust God enough to just dance? To just live, focused on Jesus, focused on the Divine, even when there is chaos and distraction? Can you remember to not be afraid and raise your eyes to Jesus when you fall? With your eyes on Jesus there will be **more love, more community, more charity, more communion with the Divine, there will be a glorious eternity**. Keep your eyes on the prize. **Amen**