

**GOOD FRIDAY SERVICE
FROM DUST TO DIAMONDS – IN 40 DAYS
MARK 14:66-72**

By Pastor John Carlini, D.Mn

We are now quickly approaching the end of our 40-day journey to finding purpose for our lives. I think that it has become clear that if we live life the way God designed it, life becomes very simple. It becomes pretty clear what we should spend our time, energy, and resources on.

Let me review what our purpose in life is.: We were created to be in a love relationship with God. He demonstrated His love for us by creating us, dying for us, and now living in us. God will see to it that we are prepared and ready to spend eternity with Him in heaven.

Worship is our first purpose in life. We have said that worship is simply a religious word that means loving God. Because God has shown us so much love and continues to show us love, He expects us to love Him back. We demonstrate our love for God by making a conscious effort to know Him more and to obey His commands. Worship is our demonstration of love to God.

Next, we found out that we are part of God's family. When we become Christians, we immediately become brothers and sisters of Jesus and of one another. We share the family inheritance, and as family, we are responsible for one another's spiritual, physical, and emotional well being. No one should fall through the cracks in the family of God. This care we provide for one another is called fellowship.

So far, it's simple, isn't it? We are to love God and love one another. We become better lovers the more we mature in our faith. Babies and children are naturally

self-centered and self-focused; when they are hungry, they cry, when they are dirty, they cry, and when young children don't get what they want when they want it, they cry. As we grow up and mature, we become aware of others, our responsibilities and our duties. In our Christian lives, we should be growing every day, every week, every month and every year. It is the sign of health. If we are not growing as believers, then we are not healthy. In fact, we may be dying. We grow by studying our Bibles, listening to and following the Holy Spirit, and letting God form our characters through circumstances. This process of growth is called discipleship.

So we were created to worship, to fellowship, and to discipleship. Next, we are called to minister. We over "religiousized" this word. We think that ministry is something the pastor ... the minister ...or the Reverend does. But ministry means that we use our talents, our abilities, our resources, and our spiritual gifts to build up the church. And remember don't get this idea of church in your head as a building or an organization, you and I are the church. We are to use all that we have to build one another up in love and unity.

Ministry builds the church in strength and character and evangelism builds up the church in numbers. Each one of us has been commissioned by God to show and tell unbelievers how much God loves them and wants to make them part of His family. God's desire is for every person in the world to hear about Him and fall in love with Him. He has given us that task.

So we have found out that life as a Christian is not all that complicated. We are called to love God, love one another, grow in our faith, build one another up in strength and character, and bring God's Good News to the lost. Pretty simple!

Then why do we find it so hard? Perhaps we are trying to do it all by the power of dust. Let's take a moment to think about the Apostle Peter's situation; I think we want to quickly dismiss Peter as a coward and a failure. But is that really the case? Peter was the disciple who first confessed Jesus as the Promised Messiah. Jesus gave the keys of the Kingdom to Peter. Peter was the only human being besides Jesus to ever walk on water. Even moments before the incident we are reading tonight, Peter grabbed a sword and fought to save Jesus. Peter was no coward. However, let's go back and look at these incidents a little closer. Right after Peter confessed Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus had to rebuke him because Peter scolded Jesus for talking about suffering and dying. True, Peter was the only human to walk on the water ... but he did become distracted and frightened, and started to sink. Peter, a fisherman, had no fighting skills. Even though he grabbed a sword and started swinging it wildly, the only thing he managed to do was cut off the ear of a servant. And here, moments later, we find him denying that he ever knew Jesus. Peter's life was punctuated by great victories, only to be immediately followed by dramatic failures. Peter was operating on dust power. If you and I continue to operate on our own strength, if we work extremely hard, we may manage to do some good things, but our lives will always slip back into failure. We must never forget that we are but dust of the earth. As I try to live out these purposes for my life, I am always reminded that I am dust.

What are some of the things that cause us to deny Christ in our lives? What are some of the things that prevent us from fulfilling God's purposes for our lives?

Pride and arrogance are probably the greatest obstacles all of us have to overcome. We think we are pretty good dust. We go out there and do all sorts of good

things and religious things, but it really doesn't seem to bring any lasting joy. Why? Perhaps we are trying to fool others around us into thinking that we are good. Perhaps we can even fool ourselves ... but as Jesus proved when He walked this earth ... He can smell a hypocrite a mile away. Here is a way to check yourself: If you are doing a lot of religious things ... and if you speak in a lot of religious language ... yet don't have real joy in life ... then you are probably a hypocrite.

God will have nothing to do with the proud and arrogant. If we think we are good in any way, then God will oppose everything we do. On the other hand, when we come to understand how sinful, how inept, and how pathetic we are, it is then that we can count on Jesus coming to work in and through us.

Peter was a proud guy. He accomplished many things, but he failed in a lot of ways as well. As we think about the humiliation and the suffering Jesus went through so that we could be in a right relationship with Him, do you think that pride or arrogance may be standing in our way to fulfilling our purposes?

Next, unresolved anger and bitterness can stop us dead in our tracks. If you are an angry person ... if you are in constant conflict with people around you ... if you are hanging on to grudges or hurts, you cannot fulfill God's purposes for your life.

Unresolved anger and bitterness has two roots. The first is pride. We say, "I don't deserve to be treated like that?" Why? Are we so holy? Jesus was betrayed by a close friend. Jesus was publicly humiliated, tortured, and killed. Did He deserve that? An unwillingness to let go of anger and bitterness is prideful.

However, holding on to anger and bitterness says that I don't trust God. God tells us to let go of anger and bitterness. God says that He will take care of handing out

judgment. What we are saying to God when we hang on to all this anger and bitterness is, “I don’t trust you God. I need to take care of myself.” When we are so caught up in unresolved anger, bitterness, grudges, and unforgiveness, there is no way we can fulfill our purposes.

Maybe we are afraid. We spend a lot of energy worrying about things. We are afraid to live. We are afraid to die. We are afraid of losing our health, our money, our loved ones, or our health. We are afraid to try new things because we are afraid to fail. Fear sucks the joy out of life and denies the promises of God.

Worldliness keeps us from fulfilling our purposes in God. Too many times we get our messages from the world around us. We watch television, movies, read magazines, and listen to the radio and our friends. We let them determine what’s good, what’s right, what’s beautiful, and what’s desirable. So we have all these expectations for our lives that we spend our time pursuing. Satan doesn’t need to do much work. While we are out chasing all these things, we are actually running away from God. Where do you get your notions of what is valuable and worth pursuing?

And don’t forget people-pleasing, which is also a form of pride and arrogance. We have this need to be revered and have people recognize our accomplishments. We forget that we are here to bring glory to God ... not ourselves.

That same sin leads to hypocrisy. There are many Christian pretenders. Many pastors get up week after week, and deliver powerful sermons ... if only they were paying attention to what they were saying. People come to church week after week and do a lot of religious stuff and good things. But they do it because it is expected of them

culturally or familiarly, or to look Christian, but keep in mind, Jesus accepts none of that. Those works are all done from dust.

What made Peter so great? He was honest with himself and with Jesus. Peter knew he was dust of the earth. He always cried out to Jesus to rescue him. If we were to read the Gospels side by side, it seems this was the order of events: Peter denied Jesus for the third time; the rooster crowed Jesus' eyes met Peter's eyes in the crowd. Jesus' words that Peter would deny him ran through Peter's mind, and at that moment, Peter broke down and cried. Peter knew he was but dust of the earth. This incident shook Peter to the core.

How about us during this 40-day journey, have we come to the realization that we have been created for great and wonderful things? Have we also come to the realization that we are miserable failures? God could not make Peter into a diamond until he was broken.

We too will remain dust until we realize that we were created to be containers. We are not God. We are containers, designed and created to be the dwelling place of God. Only God can fulfill these purposes in and through our lives. It is only by the power of God's Holy Spirit that we can fulfill our destinies. I hope that tonight, we may let Jesus' eyes meet ours, that we might hear His voice, and that we to may be broken.

It's time we take off our masks and become real before God and one another. It's time to remove the veils of pride, arrogance, fear, anger, bitterness, worldliness and religious hypocrisy. Oswald Sanders tells this story about Robert Louis Stevenson. Stevenson used to tell the story of a veiled holy man. He was a great teacher and a light among his people. The holy man said that he wore the veil because his face shined so

brightly that no one would be able to look at him. Eventually, the veil decayed and fell off ... revealing nothing but an ugly old man. Stevenson stressed that however high the truths the preacher may have taught, and however skillfully he might excuse the blemish of his character ... the time of reckoning comes for us all. When our veils are removed, all will be revealed. Either an ugly face of unrepentant fearful, ugly, worldly pride will be revealed ... or ... the beauty ... of the glory ... of our Lord Jesus Christ. On our own ... we are but dust.