

Over the past few weeks, God's Word has led us into the question of purpose.

While many try to set the agenda for our lives – parents, schools, workplace, society

-- our true purpose is given by God our Creator.

We are truly happy when we are fulfilling God's purpose for us.

We come to know our purpose through Jesus, who reveals God to us.

Jesus' purpose is **to undo the sin of Adam and Eve,**

**destroy death,**

**break down the barriers to Life,**

**and restore humanity to God's abundant life for which we were created.**

**Everything Jesus is and does fulfills his purpose and shows us ours.**

First, we saw Jesus break down the barriers to God's life for a man who was on the fringes of society – teaching us also to break down barriers to God for others.

Then, we saw Jesus traveling to Jerusalem for the fulfillment of his purpose

– his own death and resurrection to break the bonds of the evil one,

and to crush hell underfoot;

and we heard his call to follow him in fulfilling his purpose.

Last week, we learned how Jesus sends his disciples out in teams,

commissions us,

equips us with his power and authority,

**for the purpose of preparing people to meet him.**

We are sent with the peace of Christ to share.

This series on purpose looked at questions of Jesus' purpose and our purpose

– and today we finish up the series with the question

**“how do we know we are fulfilling God's purpose for us?”**

It's a good question. And not always easy to discern the answer.

Sometimes we get sidetracked doing things we think are good – and by all measures *are* good

– but if they are not the things God wants us to be doing, then we are not fulfilling his purpose for us.

Collecting winter coats for children is a great thing – unless the children live in Africa. . . .

Computers for the underprivileged are also a good thing – but not the priority if those people are starving.

You see – discerning whether or not we are fulfilling God's purpose is not as simple as it sounds.

**It requires prayer and paying attention – to God's Word and to the Holy Spirit.**

Since Jesus' purpose is to undo the sin of Adam and Eve,  
to break down the barriers to eternal life,

Then it should come as little surprise that for us – the baptized –  
to fulfil God's purpose for us has to do with going back to  
the beginning – as though sin had never happened.

What Jesus did in that Holy Week was in fact to destroy sin and death. By rising from the dead, he began the restoration of the broken creation.

So we who share in his death and resurrection by Holy Baptism get to live knowing that sin has no more power to break us.

We get to fulfill God's purpose in the creation being made new by God's resurrection love.

It's important that we take time each morning to remember that and give thanks – try it while you are washing your face or brushing your teeth.

So, to fulfill God's purpose, we go back to the beginning.

The very first command God gave to the newly minted creation was ... Be fruitful and multiply.

That is the purpose of creation – and it is the purpose of the new creation.

Whether or not creation was fulfilling that purpose was visible in the fruit of the action

- fruit of the womb, children,
- fruit of multiplying animals and insect life, birds and fish
- Fruit of the soil, food,
- Multiplication of fruit season after season, generation after generation.

That's why in the bible, barrenness was such a big deal, because the visible signs of fulfilling God's purpose were absent.

Today, churches often look at empty pews, dwindling offerings, and lack of young people as signs of barrenness.

God's purpose is not being fulfilled.

But we know that barrenness is not the whole story –or the last word.

Where Sarah and Hannah and Elizabeth and Rebekah prayed for God to fulfill his purpose in their barren wombs, God did just that.

And he does it for other kinds of barrenness, too – water in the desert, health for the disabled, life for the dead.

These are signs of God's fruitfulness in our world.

How do we know we are fulfilling God's purpose for us?

When we are fruitful.

**-- when our actions bear fruit to multiply the family of God.**

We hear a lot about fruit and fruitfulness in today's scriptures.

God's purpose and fruitfulness go together.

Deuteronomy speaks of the fruitfulness of faithfulness to the covenant relationship with God.

The fruit of faithfulness is physical, tangible

– the people will have babies,

■ the earth will produce abundantly,

■ and the livestock will reproduce creating wealth.

When we are faithful to the relationship God has with us,  
we find we have **plenty**

- plenty to live on,
- plenty to share,
- and plenty of people to share it with.

**God has promised.**

He wants nothing more than to give us everything we need.

So, when we are fulfilling God's purpose for our lives,

**the tangible fruits of our actions will be noticeable as  
the Gospel multiplies people and resources.**

...

**But physical, tangible fruits are not the only measure of  
fruitfulness.**

St. Paul speaks of the fruit of good works and growth in the  
knowledge of God

**in response to the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ.**

- In other words, when we find ourselves seeking to know  
more of God,
- when we find ourselves more deeply in prayer,
- and serving others because to do otherwise would betray  
Christ's love,

- then the Holy Spirit is working in us to produce the fruit by which we are fulfilling God's purpose.

Take that Samaritan, for example. He did not set out that day looking for a good deed to do to impress God.

He was going about his business when he stumbled upon the man dying in the road.

But when he came across that man, **he acted to give life to the man.**

He acted in such a way that nothing was more important in that moment but to respond to that need.

He didn't think about how many brownie points he'd win with God – or even what the papers might say about it the next day.

He simply acted to do what he could, with what he had, to preserve life for his fellow human being.

It was a resurrection action – an un-self-conscious participation in the new creation that Jesus makes possible and calls us to share.

...

This quality of un-self-consciousness is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The ancient Jews wrote the law on parchment and placed it in a small box called a tefellin and bound it to their foreheads.

But God promised to write the new covenant on the hearts of his people

- it would become second nature to them
- his Spirit would make sure.

So, how do we know we are fulfilling God's purpose for our lives?

- When we are no longer looking in the mirror when asking the question.
- When the answer is revealed in the fruits of our actions – and pointed out by others.

St. Paul, for example, observed it in the church in Colossae based on the reports he had heard about their deeds of love toward others and their commitment to gathering to learn and grow in faith.

These are signs of fruitfulness in the life of discipleship.

Is our life multiplying people who join with us in following Jesus?

Does our life point others to Jesus as the source of the greatest joy?

I know my own answer to that is sometimes yes, sometimes no.

I struggle with living a fruitful life – it isn't always easy. Often, I have to get out of God's way.

St. Paul points us to the most important thing of all in discerning and fulfilling God's purpose for our lives:

Prayer – and not just for ourselves, but for each other.

*The apostles have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, <sup>10</sup>so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God.*

It is impossible to fulfill God's purpose for us – as individuals and as a church – if we are not immersed and surrounded by prayer.

I know many of you pray for me – and I pray for you, too – and for us together.

It is essential that we take time to pray for one another.

**Everything we do as those who share the resurrection life of Jesus**

**– is done in conversation with God, with his Word, with his people.**

Then, when we act, the fruit of our actions will give life to those we encounter and we will be swept up in the abundance of God's love and mercy.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen