

WD September 18, 2023

## “Milestones”

By now most of us understand what a milestone is. According to the lower Merion Historical Society website it all started with the Romans. The Latin “milia passuum,” means a thousand paces. The Romans also erected stone markers at mile intervals to notify the passerby of distances covered or the number of miles to go to reach their destination. These markers were conveniently called milestones.

According to the website, early in American history, Philadelphia was a major city in Pennsylvania. Roads radiated in all directions like a spider’s web to the surrounding towns. The Old Philadelphia Court House was the starting point. Benjamin Franklin, the Colonial Postmaster, had milestones erected to help the mail be more efficient. The milestones became the initial beginnings of our addresses. For example, the Merion Meeting House was listed at the address of 7-5 (7 miles and 5 furlongs). Franklin invented the odometer which he attached to a carriage wheel to measure the distances.

[https://lowermerionhistory.org/?page\\_id=186987#:~:text=Ancient%20Landmarks&text=The%20Latin%20is%20%E2%80%9Cmilia%20passuum,markers%20were%20conveniently%20called%20milestones.](https://lowermerionhistory.org/?page_id=186987#:~:text=Ancient%20Landmarks&text=The%20Latin%20is%20%E2%80%9Cmilia%20passuum,markers%20were%20conveniently%20called%20milestones.)

We all know that a milestone usually marks a moment or an event that marks an important stage in development or a significant change. History is full of milestones like the first man on the moon, or the invention of penicillin. But the ones that we remember most are the milestones that are much closer to home. The milestones that have a personal impact upon us are the ones we remember most. For example, just recently, my 9 month old grandson, took his first steps. In the video you can see him walking toward his dad giggling and laughing as his little unsteady legs carries him along. Very exciting and fun to watch.

Usually, we can think back to significant events where our lives pivoted because of an event. Crawling to walking is one case. One of the most vivid milestones in my case was when our family started going to church after my Grandpa Woods passed away. It was a huge pivot point that led me here talking to you as a Pastor of a Lutheran Church 38 years later. I was fifteen at the time and knew nothing of the church life back when we started. It was like moving to a foreign country where I had to learn the history, learn the language, and the culture. I had no idea how our family going to church would shape the rest of my life.

That first visit to church led me on a path to becoming a pastor. And along the way another significant milestone occurred my Vicarage, what the secular world would call an internship. About eight months into Vicarage I met my wife, Tricia. From there I had two sons, and now we have our first grandson who just started walking.

The point of bringing up milestones today is that the true milestones cannot be compartmentalized. The milestones in my life were as much spiritual as they were life happening. I can see now looking back how those events literally shaped my life and how the Lord turned them into places that transformed who I was along the way.

Probably the most notable example of a milestone for Saint Paul was his conversion. In Acts 26 Paul has to defend himself to Agrippa. As he speaks of his mission and purpose who makes it a point to explain milestone made him the person he was and how it shaped everything afterward. He says,

<sup>9</sup>“I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. <sup>10</sup> And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the Lord’s people in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. <sup>11</sup> Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities.

<sup>12</sup>“On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. <sup>13</sup> About noon, King Agrippa, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. <sup>14</sup> We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’

<sup>15</sup>“Then I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’

“ ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ the Lord replied. <sup>16</sup> ‘Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. <sup>17</sup> I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them <sup>18</sup> to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’

Paul, once known only by a reputation for persecuting the church intensely and trying to destroy it eventually became a reason to praise God. Paul gives all credit to his conversion and his work to the grace of God. Paul gives all focus to the Lord, Jesus and uses himself as an example of how incredible the grace of Jesus Christ is. It brings Paul new purpose in his life, namely the preaching of the Gospel. For Paul it was all about the cross and resurrection. Paul’s life and purpose become intermingled with the Gospel for which he willingly endured all kinds of trouble. But Paul was so transformed by his faith in Jesus that everything even being unfairly imprisoned in Rome was considered a milestone. He even gives thanks for being in prison because it allowed him to preach the Gospel to Roman Praetorian guards.

So, what are the milestones in your life? There may be many. For some, one of those milestones may be a Damascus milestone, a moment that changed everything and shaped everything that led to where you are now. As you look back on your milestones my hope today is to take note of how the Lord may be blessing those moments to bring you closer to himself. In my case the Lord turned a huge loss in my life into a kind of reset for our family that led us to church. For anyone experiencing loss this is an unhappy and unwelcome milestone in life. Yet the Lord who turns death into resurrection can use even tragedy and loss to bring us closer to Himself. Thorns become opportunity for grace. Weakness becomes an opportunity to lean into the Lord for strength. Blessings become opportunities to give thanks. First steps become an opportunity to savor a moment and give praise to the Lord even as I celebrate those steps. May the milestones in your life be marked the Lord’s hand to draw you closer to Himself. When they come, good or bad, lean into Your Lord.

Pastor Matt Woods  
John 3:30