

Weekly Devotion, August 24, 2020
Pastor Matthew Woods, Grace Lutheran Church in New Albany, Indiana.

“Taking Aim”

One of my favorite places to go as a little kid was to my great-grandparents house in Kingston, Michigan. On one occasion I found a sling shot in their garage. So, while grandma was inside I proceeded to shoot rocks across the road into a large garden directly across the road. Back then my grandparents had a half-acre garden and my vague memory of the garden across the road was that it was just as large. I should also add that back then kids were able to go outside and find things to do with constant supervision—although I probably could have used a little supervision on this particular day. Anyway, I knew what sling shots could do. So pulled back hard on that slingshot just to watch the rock sail in a big arch over the road to the garden. At first I aiming for the big tree next to the garden across the road. In truth, I mostly just liked shooting rocks.

Everything was fine until the neighbor lady across the road decided to work out in her garden—the very same garden that I was shooting rocks in. She wandered out in her long, very plain looking, country work dress, wearing tall rain boots. She was a bit heavy set and carried a basket. Did I stop? Not on your life.

When someone should have been yelling; “Get behind me, Satan” my mind was saying “Keep firing.” As this woman bent over to work in her garden I fired over and over. She was a lot more fun to aim at than the tree. The rocks landed all around her. I can remember her looking in the direction of the last rock that landed near her. Then another. Then another. The rocks kept landing near her. She, naturally got suspicious. It took her a while to figure out what that noise was. Finally, she stood up and looked around to see me holding the sling shot in the garage across the street. I remember her yelling out, “Are you shooting rocks? You better not be shooting rocks at me!” She was not very happy with me. I did what any child at that age does, especially a little devil that I was on that day. I denied any guilt. “I mean it!” she said before going back to gardening. Did I stop? Nope. I just took better aim

With the neighbor’s sizeable presence facing in my direction I saw a target I couldn’t refuse. I took careful aim. I pulled back hard and let that rock fly. Zing! The next thing I saw was that woman straighten right up with her hand holding her back left cheek. Bullseye! She marched right on over to straighten me out. I of course ran into the house and let grandma handle it. That poor neighbor didn’t have a chance with Grandma and I knew it. I don’t know what she said but whatever she said took care of it. Grandma was always quick to laugh pretty hard when the story was retold. She always said, “I don’t know how he could miss!” And laugh some more.

Whatever you take aim at is what you will shoot for. And what one aims at may either bring out the little devil in us or a faithful servant. Lord willing what we aim at is something that will bless us, bless others, and not...um...sting. Most of us want to leave our mark, but the right kind of mark on others—Hopefully our actions will leave a Jesus impression on others instead of a welt that wounds someone’s spirit or person. In Philippians 3:4-6 Paul talks about his previous life. It was a life that started with godly intentions but did great damage. It seemed that what he aimed at had great success, at least in a Jewish mind back in Paul’s day. But he later describes in verses 7-11 that meeting Jesus changed what He was aiming for in this world. Consider the passage.

“If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.” Paul was top of his class and well on his way to being a powerful man. But it was bringing out the devil in Paul rather than good. In fact, we first meet Paul as a persecutor of the church. He believed at the time that he was protecting Judaism and honoring Yahweh. But then He meets Jesus on the road to Damascus and all of His priorities changed. He was aiming at the wrong things.

He goes on to say, “⁷ But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.”

Everything we take aim at in life whether it be a good education, a good job, a nice house etc. are truly a blessing when we keep our aim first and foremost on Jesus. Some of us may ask ourselves, “Is the job we are working glorifying Jesus or glorifying ourselves?” “Have we picked a spouse that will enhance a relationship with Jesus or make it harder?” “Have we chosen a lifestyle that is far too busy for Jesus?” “Are the things we are doing making us closer to our family or pulling us apart?” It’s important that if we take aim at something, we know what our target is. It’s also important to know that if we hit our target, we aren’t going to hurt ourselves or someone else. The last thing we want is a pain in our back fender or to create pain in someone else’s fender. Faith in Jesus when exercised in His grace should produce fruits consistent with Spirit for example. You know those fruits in Galatians 5:23 “Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control”.

In order for Paul to become the effective instrument that he ultimately became, Paul had to change what He was aiming at. He called those things that were once so important and sources of pride for Paul, garbage. Compared to knowing Christ crucified and the hope of the resurrection those things meant nothing. More than that, those things Paul held so much pride in were only bringing out the devil in Paul rather than something good.

That’s the interesting thing with Covid. For many it has been a time of reflection and personal evaluation. Many have lost their jobs and many have had to change direction; change what they are aiming at. Covid has forced many into change. But so doing it has offered a rare opportunity to reexamine one’s life and evaluate one’s priorities and to count up what really matters. This much is very true. Evaluating what we are aiming at once in a while to see if it’s what we should be aiming at, is important especially in light of the Christian faith.

So, consider some questions to ask as about our aims. “Is it good?” “Is it necessary?” “Would God approve?” “What do those that we love most say about it?” “Are we ready to refine or altar our aims to avoid becoming that little devil?”

In the end, godly aims should build up others and honor our Lord and by the grace of God they will. So, aim high and let the rock of your Salvation be something you stand on rather than something you slingshot at someone.

And now the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look on you with his favor and give you His peace in Jesus. Amen.
Matthew Woods
John 3:30