

Procrastinating... most of us do it – some do it much more frequently than others.

This last week I heard an interview of a professor of psychology at Carleton University whose specialty was procrastination.

He said the core reason behind procrastination is a problem at regulating emotions. We look at something (a task, a “to-do”) and we emotionally react to it because it looks hard, uncomfortable, inconvenient, or unfun. Our emotions tell us we don’t want to face that task right now. So we tell ourselves lies to justify putting it off.

But they are lies. To fight procrastination we need to do a better job of regulating our emotional response and the lies those emotions lead us to accept.

That big paper isn’t going to be any easier to write tomorrow.

That difficult conversation isn’t going to be any less uncomfortable tomorrow.

Getting the oil changed isn’t going to be any less inconvenient tomorrow.

You are not going to be in a better mood to do that big pile of dishes tomorrow.

Some like to think that they work better under the pressure procrastination creates, but the reality is that *the only time they work* is under pressure and if you slow down and think about it, there is something not quite right, something sad about that – only working under pressure.

The thoughts we don’t think about, the thoughts we don’t analyze, can be dangerous things.

When it comes to procrastinating, not thinking through your thoughts and identifying the lie you are telling yourself to justify putting off a task, it’s not all that dangerous. Often the worst that can happen is not getting as good of a grade on that paper as you could have.

But there are some areas of life where not thinking about our thoughts can have some very serious ramifications.

If you’ve ever been around Alcoholics Anonymous or other recovery groups, maybe you’ve heard the phrase “Stinking thinking.” We think stinky things – like we are never going to amount to anything, or who could love me anyway, and those un-examined thoughts, those un-thought about lies, those stinking thoughts often lead to stinky action – like the bottle for a recovering alcoholic.

But it’s not just recovering addicts that face real consequences if they don’t think about the thoughts they have.

This is a truth that has profound implications for our souls: There are few things more dangerous in life than the thoughts we don’t think about.

Today we are going to talk about how to define success.

When it comes to defining what it means to be successful and how to obtain and keep success there are a whole bunch of thoughts that we think as a culture, as generations, as individuals, there are a whole bunch of ways that we think about success, but I wonder if we always think those thoughts through. I wonder if we always

allow God’s word to guide those thoughts or if we really just don’t think about them much at all.

The message of Jesus isn’t just a story that gives you hope for heaven that doesn’t really impact your day to day choices. The message of Jesus is a life-changing message that is *supposed to* influence and guide *every* thought you think.

We read from Paul’s first letter to the Christians living in Corinth just a bit ago, in his second letter to the Corinthians Paul wrote this: **“We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”**

Every thought we think is *supposed to* be made captive and obedient to Christ.

When it comes to success and how to think about success, this world has a lot of persuasive arguments and a lot of pretensions – claims that what they think is the right way to think about success. But when it comes to success and how Christ defines success... it couldn’t be more different, it couldn’t be more countercultural, and if we don’t realize that, if we don’t think about those thoughts we run the risk of thinking and living at odds with how God would have us think and live when it comes to success.

So let’s talk about how Jesus defines success and how that should impact how we think about success.

In Matthew 5 Jesus sees this mass of people following him wherever he goes because word has spread quickly about the amazing miracles he is doing, and he heads up on a mountainside to teach this group. And his opening lesson from his famous Sermon on the Mount that we are going to read over the next few weeks here at St. Paul’s is a lesson on how God defines and thinks about success. He uses a synonym for success, “blessed” – blessed by God. Here are Jesus’ thoughts on what it means to be less by God, or successful:

**Blessed, successful, are the poor in spirit.**

**Blessed, successful, are those who mourn.**

**Blessed, successful, are the meek**

**Blessed, are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.**

**Blessed, are the merciful.**

**Blessed, are the pure in heart.**

**Blessed, are the peacemakers.**

**Blessed, are those who are persecuted.**

**Blessed, successful, are you when people insult you, persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you.**

If you are poor in spirit, mourning, meek, hungry for justice, thirsty for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemaking, persecuted, and insulted then rejoice! Rejoice and be glad because you are experiencing the blessing of your God – you are experiencing success.

What’s that now, Jesus?

It doesn’t take a whole lot of thinking about these thoughts to realize just how different they are than what the world thinks success is.

These words, they are called the Beatitudes (which is Latin for “blessed, or happy, or successful”) were read at President Trumps inauguration by one of the pastors President Trump invited.

I couldn’t help but notice the irony as in the following days President Trump and the media started making a big deal about how many people did or didn’t show up to his inauguration.

President Trump and the media wanted to use the number of people in the crowds to judge how successful Trump should feel about being elected president. Many of the same folks are making a big deal over the same thing when it comes to the popular vote, right? Because success would be a big crowd and lots of votes.

Can you see the irony? That’s not at all how Jesus defined success in the Beatitudes.

This is how the world defines success: How many people would vote for you? How many people showed up to congratulate you? How many likes did your Facebook or Instagram post get? How many shares did your tweet get? How many views did your YouTube video get? How many Christmas cards came in the mail? That’s how to measure success.

Jesus says success is when no one votes for you; when no one shows up; when on one congratulates; when no one likes or shares, retweets or views. No, instead, success is when they mock and hate and insult you.

This is a truly mind-boggling, backwards from the rest of the world, way to think about success. This first lesson from the Sermon on the Mount takes everything this world thinks about success and turns it on its head.

Think for just a minute what it would mean to take every thought you have and make it captive to this thought of Jesus’.

It means when the ref blows the call in the Packer game or your kids basketball game the proper response isn’t to call into question the ref’s ability to see, but to stop and think, “Thank you God for this opportunity to be wronged – what a blessing!”

It means that when that guy cuts you off in traffic, the successful thing to do isn’t to speed up and hug his bumper, or speed past him use a certain finger to make sure he knows how much he inconvenienced you; it means the right thing to do is smile and think, “Hey, God just blessed me.”

It means when the waitress is doing a horrible job – you have to wait 20 minutes to put your order in, she never refills your drinks, you have to practically stand on your chair to get her attention – that instead of giving her a piece of your mind, or shorting her on the tip, you think, “Thank you God for blessing me with poor service, and this woman must have something going on in her life that is affecting her work so let me give her an extra big tip to help make her day a little better.”

It changes the way we think about little things and big things.

When you refuse to accept this world’s definition of love and sexuality, and refuse to keep your mouth shut about your family member who has embraced homosexuality and you get shunned and cut off from your own family or friends, it

means you think, “Thank you God for blessing me with this persecution, what a successful person I am!”

When you will not stop inviting people to come and see the amazing things Jesus has done for you, even at the work place and your boss tells you that you need to stop bringing your religion to work or face discipline, you take a page from Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego’s book, refuse, get canned, and think, “Thank you God for his blessing! Now I really know what it is like to feel successful.”

When you are at the doctor’s office and you hear that big ugly “C” word – cancer – your first reaction is, “Thank you Lord! I cannot wait to see all the ways this cancer will bless me and my family.”

Can you see how crazy and different this is compared to our natural reaction, to those thoughts we and the rest of our culture think when it comes to blessings and success?

The implications of this redefined success are incredible, and humbling. Humbling because, like I said before, there are few things more dangerous than the thoughts we don’t think about. If you think back to your thoughts of this last week you will find plenty of instances when you thought the world’s thoughts on success. When you did not take every thought you had about happiness and success and make them captive to Christ – and those sins (because that’s what they are), they have very real implications for your soul.

But there is one key thing that I haven’t talked about yet, and that’s the “why?”.

Why in the world would we adopt this kind of thinking that is so foreign, so different, so countercultural, so difficult? Why in the world would we take every thought we have about success and make it captive to this thought of Christ?

Jesus gives us the answer to that:

**“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**<sup>4</sup> Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.**

**<sup>5</sup> Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.**

**<sup>6</sup> Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.**

**<sup>7</sup> Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.**

**<sup>8</sup> Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.**

**<sup>9</sup> Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.**

**<sup>10</sup> Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**<sup>11</sup> “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”**

The secret to making our thoughts about success captive to Christ, the secret to redefining success as Jesus does is perspective. They “why” we should do this...

You can rejoice no matter what your temporary earthly circumstance, you can rejoice *especially* if your temporary earthly circumstance is bad because your circumstances are just that – they are *temporary* and they are *earthly*.

You can rejoice, you can redefine success because Jesus, the same Jesus who is asking you to think this way, thought this way while he lived the perfect life that you and I don't – always making his thoughts captive to his Father's thoughts. He lived thinking this way and he died thinking this way because he knew it was all about perspective. He could handle the miseries of life on this earth and the atrocities of death on a cross because he knew that his present sufferings were nothing compared to the eternity of perfection that was coming for him in heaven – an eternity he would get to spend with *you* because that was why he was on this earth in the first place – to make sure he could spend all of eternity with *you*.

It's kind of like this rope (a long rope with 2 inches colored black on one end):

This here, this black part, is your life on this earth. This is the 70 or 80, 90 or 100 years you will live on this earth if you have the strength.

The rest of this rope... eternity in heaven, bought and paid for by Jesus Christ on his cross, guaranteed in his resurrection.

You want to know how and why you should make your thoughts captive to Christ and redefine blessing and success. You want to know why you should consider weakness, failure, suffering, and persecution a blessing?

Jesus says it's all about perspective.

You may suffer, hurt, and be trampled on for your entire life if you live thinking the way Jesus calls you to think today, but it's still only your life on this earth – it's this little hunk of black, compared to the rest of this rope.

Those hurts are God's temporary way of reminding you that you need to think about your thoughts – you are not at the rest of this rope yet, you are not in eternity yet. Don't forget that this world is not your home. Don't forget how much you need your God and there is something far, far better waiting for you after this earth.

Success has been redefined for us because there is no way of thinking about success in this world that can come even remotely close to the success that is coming for us, when the mourners will be comforted, when the meek will inherit the earth, when those who hunger for justice and thirst for righteousness will be filled, when the merciful will be shown mercy, when the pure in heart will see God, when we rejoice forever because great is our reward in heaven.

That friends, is the definition of success.

Amen.