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Thriv'era | We Are...Missional

Days of Generous Thriving

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I was buying a musical instrument from a deceased individual. Specifically, I was buying a trumpet from his widow - a young wife and mother who was suddenly and tragically without a husband and a father to her three little girls. When I met her, the family was desperately trying to cope with the overwhelming grief. Tending to a seemingly endless list of details, she was selling her husband's trumpet—the very instrument he had played so skillfully in his life. But his music had come to an abrupt stop. The symphony of his life ended somewhere in the first third of the performance. He was barely into his third decade of life. Now, he was gone.

He had been a Navy pilot at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island in my hometown, Oak Harbor, Washington. Like many young pilots, he was getting ready to practice night maneuvers. So, after positioning his A-6 Intruder to the far east end of the runway, he turned the plane around to face due-west and continued through the pre-flight checklist. By the end of the process, he'd toggled every switch, tweaked every dial, and turned every knob that needed to be toggled, tweaked and turned. Then, a few moments later, he was cleared for takeoff by the tower. As the two Pratt & Whitney jet engines roared, and with just moments remaining before the 9300 pounds of thrust from each engine would launch the aircraft into the dark western sky over the Strait of Juan de Fuca, the A-6 Intruder remained motionless. With the brakes engaged and engines running, the tower again signaled "Clear for Takeoff" and waited for a response, but there was none. A third time, the tower attempted to communicate with the pilot. In the next frantic moments, a security team was deployed to the idling jet at the far east end of the runway. Arriving on the scene, a member of the Shore Patrol climbed up to the cockpit and found the pilot—the young man in his early thirties, with a wife and family, hopes and dreams, goals and desires, and a mission—lifeless at the controls of the aircraft. He was dead of a heart attack.

I've lived with this story for most of my life. One of the reasons this story is so captivating for me is that I really wonder how the young pilot might have lived his life had he known his symphony of life would end that way. If he'd somehow known that his life would be shortened, how would he have then lived? How would he have defined his mission? How would he have lived his mission? And because I've always wondered about the pilot, I wonder about those questions in my own life.

We're in the last week of our Thriv'era series. We've been exploring what it means to thrive as people of God in this and every time and era of life. We've taken the time to consider our identity as spirited, creative, and connected people, called to be present, grateful, generous, and missional with our lives. We've thought about how this particular series of life rhythms helps us bring some good to each moment, something better to each day, and our best to each other as we encounter the world around us. This week, we're focusing on Mission. The starting point is this: As Children of God who bear the image of the Divine, a sense of mission is woven into our very nature. We thrive as missional people by nurturing the momentum for healing and unity by actively pursuing movements that generate hope and wholeness for all people. We've asked four core questions: Who are we – identity. What are we doing here – purpose. Where are we going – Vision. How will we get there – Mission.

There's a pivotal passage in the first book of the Bible, Genesis, the book of New Beginnings. It's a story about a man named Abram who experienced a lot of change and transition. When he was 75 years old, he had his name changed just to bring a little more focus to what he was doing. Along with his name, pretty much everything else changed, including where he would live. What I'd like to do today is give you just a bit of context and then read the passage. Then I want to tease out a couple of observations that will help connect it to

our lives, then I want to ask you a couple of really, really hard questions. Are you ready for that?

A lot happens in the first 11 chapters of Genesis. There's a beautiful poem about creation. God has provided everything needed for a well-balanced planet. But as soon as the first family shows up, they make a royal mess of everything; a brother by the name of Cain is jealous of his brother by the name of Abel, and all of a sudden, there's a murder mystery: God literally asks, "Why did you do that?" as if God doesn't know. And then it goes from bad to worse. There's Noah, a boat, a rainstorm, a flood, then a rainbow and a promise. Then, more dysfunction as a group of entrepreneurs builds a 300-foot tower into the sky to try to catch a glimpse of God. There's a lot of confusion. People stop listening to each other, talking over each other so fast that nothing makes sense, and the people scatter. And then God says to Abram, we're going in a different direction. We're going to do something entirely new. And that's where we pick up the story in Genesis 12:1-3:

¹ Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Three of the most strategic and important words in the Hebrew Scriptures are right here: "So Abram went..." Nothing happens if Abram doesn't go. God says to Abram, "Leave your country, your family, and your home, and go." It was a huge mission and a huge challenge: leave what's known and familiar, walk away from what's safe and manageable and doable, and just head out, take a risk, and get going. Now, sure, Abram was not perfect—far from it. But we learn here that God doesn't call the perfect or even the equipped. God equips the called. To thrive as a missional child of God is to know that leaving what's known and familiar, walking away from what seems safe and manageable—and doable—and stepping into risk is doable because God goes with us to prepare the way. We are never alone.

God challenges Abram and Sarah with a road trip of biblical proportions. Abram and Sarah

with a road trip of biblical proportions. Abram and Sarah will leave everything safe, secure, and known and head into the dangerous, risky, and unknown. Hearts are pounding, right? God says, "...leave your country, your family, and your home, and go...." What's not secure about that? Well, everything! But God provided something else—a promise. God said, "I will... provide a new place, a new land, a place that I will show you."

God is still making that promise to us today. God says, "I will..." provide a new place. This is God's promise to continue to create a place for people to thrive. God says, "I will..." make of you a great nation. This is about God equipping us to bring our spirited influence wherever we are to bring new life to others. God says, "I will..." make you a blessing to others. This is about God equipping us to create a transformational impact in our community. God says, "I will..." multiply blessings through you. This is about creating momentum for peace and justice in the world. Abram must have sensed that this would be a tall order. But we know two things for sure: Abram went, and God made good on the promises.

Each of the seven Thriving Rhythms has a Guiding Narrative. The guiding narrative for the seventh rhythm, "We are missional," is this: "As image bearers of the Divine, a sense of mission is woven into our very nature. We thrive as missional people by nurturing the momentum for healing and unity by actively pursuing movements that generate hope and wholeness for all people."

The best way to lean into that and embrace a thriving, missional life as followers of Christ is to revisit the four strategic questions we began with several weeks ago.

First, will our response to God's call equip us to bring our own unique influence into the lives of others? When we ask the question, "What are we doing here?" we're acknowledging that we do nothing without God's Spirit breathing us into life one breath at a time! When we become aware that each breath is a gift, we are inspired to use our creativity to bring life and more life to others.

Second, will our response to God's call to bring some good to each moment, something better to each day, and our best to one another as we encounter the world around us, create a deeper sense of thriving for those around us? When we ask

the question, “Where are we going?” we have an opportunity to align ourselves with God’s mission – what God is up to in the community around us.

Third, will our response to God’s call to practice gratitude and model generosity have a profound effect on the next generation? When we ask the question, “Where are we going?” we can do so with confidence that we are being led by the Spirit to model lives that matter.

Fourth, will our response to God's call to embrace the mission of the church in the world reveal the kingdom of God in and through this church? When we ask the question, “How will we get there—when we ask the missional question, may it be true of us that we are going headlong into the mission of Christ in the world in a way that doesn’t just make a difference in the world, but indeed, makes a different world altogether.

So, let’s make this sticky. Write a note, make a call, tell someone...

What emerges from these three words: “So Abram went...” is an example of what happens when the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ gets loose in our lives. When that happens, there will always be more "I love you," more "I'm sorry," more "I'm listening," and more "I am fully living!" When that happens, there will always be more music.