

One of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's immortal comments which inspired our nation was, "This generation of Americans has a rendezvous with destiny." Destiny has a ring to it, doesn't it? Do you believe in destiny? As you look back on 1986, can you see destiny exerting its influence over you? Can you see a pattern working in and through all the events and your response to those events? Do you feel compelled, motivated, dominated by something bigger than yourself?

In the Peanuts comic strip, by Charles Schulz, Snoopy the dog was moved into deep contemplation as he watched Charlie Brown and Linus pass by. He said to himself in a series of meditative thoughts: "I wonder why some of us were born dogs while others were born people? Is it just pure chance, or what is it? Somehow, the whole thing doesn't seem fair." And then he emerged from his meditation and went tripping away, with one concluding question, "Why should I have been the lucky one?" His destiny was to be a dog, and he was happy with destiny, feeling himself quite superior to humans.

Some university students were asked to state their most difficult personal problem. 75% listed lack of confidence. So many of us have feelings of inferiority, doubt, inadequacy and insecurity. Some people are afraid--afraid to assert themselves; afraid to express opinions; afraid to take a job; afraid to ask for a raise; afraid to compete, feeling they are not as athletic, or as pretty, or as popular as others. They doubt their abilities. They mistrust their ability to handle responsibility, including the responsibility for their own lives. They lack a belief in their own worth.

Perhaps they need a dose of destiny--a strong, powerful, motivating, compelling, sense of destiny. After attending a high school class reunion, Glendon Harris reflected on those former classmates who had done something significant with their lives. He concluded, "Somewhere along the way they were captured by an idea or received a vision which became the ruling passion of their lives. It glowed in the darkness and led them through the hard days." Have you been captured by an idea or a vision? Do you have a compelling, reassuring sense of destiny about your life?

In our epistle lesson this morning, Paul writes of the plan God has for the creation, a plan which was fashioned even before the world was made. Paul is so captured by the wonder of God's love and his own destiny in that plan that the entire passage, Ephesians 1:3-14, is only one sentence in the original Greek text. The translators have much fun trying to interpret and translate a two-paragraph sentence. Paul is exclaiming about God's plan. Even before the world began, God chose us to be his people. "God destined us in love to be his children through Jesus Christ." Do you have confidence that God has a plan, has a plan that will withstand pressure, a plan that will not fail, a plan for the redemption of all there is, and that you have a significant role--a destiny--in the fulfillment of that plan?

In this passage, Paul is talking about the Jews. The Jews were the chosen people, destined in love to be his people. We also must remember that Paul is talking about a community of people, rather than individual persons. God called a nation--the Jews--and culminated his call, his revelation, in Jesus. The Jews had first crack, then the call was opened to the gentiles. God's plan is to unite all creation, bring it all back together, including humanity,

with Christ as head. All things are done in accordance with this plan. You and I are created, placed on this earth at this time, and called to help carry out the plan, to lose ourselves in the service of God in the task of redemption. It is in doing God's work that we find our significance. Destined in love, your life has a destiny. Believing in destiny can give you a sense of joy, relief, peace, and confidence.

Your destiny, however, is not inexorable. It is not a predestined fatalism from which you cannot extricate yourself. There are destinies and there are destinies. Some folks are caught in the web of bad patterns, of destinies they have slowly built by making poor choices. For example, some people have a terrific sense of martyrdom. They believe if anything bad can happen, it will happen to them. It was said of one woman, "She had the canny assurance that, come what might be, she would be wronged." And so she lived her life setting herself up to suffer. Some folks think it is their destiny to be "no good" and they continually act in such a way to provoke the response of failure. They set themselves up to fail and when they fail, are again convinced failure is their destiny. The patterns are predictable. Many of us set ourselves up and repeat the predictable results over and over. The vicious repetitions lead some to believe in predestination or fatalism, believing there is no free choice; believing that all events are predestined to happen and you can't change the inevitable.

But, we can be freed. Christ will set you free from such determinism. We humans are not puppets, dancing out our existence at the end of fate's string. We may allow ourselves to become puppets, but even then Christ can free us. Christ can set you free from your bad choices, so that you may live out God's destiny for you. I believe our lives have purpose, and we can choose to find that destiny, make the choices that are in accord with that destiny, and let the vision, the purpose become the ruling passion of our lives. Your life then becomes the living out of your destiny, and in the living out of your destiny, you experience peace, courage, confidence.

Perhaps you can't see ahead; but, can you see the hand of God in your life that has brought you to this day? If it is difficult to see a destiny in your future, can you see how events of the past have conspired to bring you to where you are today? How many choices you made, how many doors opened for you at the right time and right place, how many different roads you could have chosen; yet you chose those roads which have brought you here today. As you begin 1987, live in the confidence of your destiny. Decide to make choices in accordance with your destiny. Make those choices that will free you from poor choices and enslaving patterns, and put you in touch with your destiny which will inspire you, capture you and become the ruling passion of your life.

Is it circular--is it ironic--that a discussion of destiny brings us to the importance of choice? Your destiny--God's plan, God's will for your life--is not forced upon you. It is not predetermined. It is planned, but you have to decide to accept the plan and make those choices that fulfill your destiny. It is not easy to make decisions. Most of us would rather postpone decisions and let life happen to us. A woman decided to travel and went to a travel agent named Patrick Finnegan O'Riley who suggested a safari to Africa.

"Oh, no," she said. "I couldn't stand the smell of animals, much less killing them."

"Well, perhaps a trip to India and a visit to the shrines."

"No," she said. "India is full of diseases, I am told, and also Hindus. I really wouldn't want to go there."

"How about a trip to Ireland, to the old country?"

"No," she answered. "I understand that Ireland is cold and damp and full of Catholics."

To which Patrick Finnegan O'Riley drew himself up and replied, "Well then, madam, how about going to hell? I understand it is hot, dry, and full of Protestants." Making decisions is not easy, and not deciding is to let someone else, like O'Reilly, decide where you should go!

In his most famous novel, *The Trial*, Franz Kafka has the hero wander into a church where he hears a priest tell a parable of a man who was told to enter a kingdom through a certain gate. When he arrived, he found the gate but he noticed a sentinel guarding the entrance. So he sat down and waited for the sentinel to give him instructions, or to grant permission to enter. But the guard did nothing and said nothing. So the man continued to sit there waiting for something to happen, waiting for someone to come. For a whole life he sat there. Then the guard closed the door. He said to the man, "The door was made for you, and for you alone. And because you chose not to enter it, it is being closed forever." The "waiting one" missed his destiny. You go through your own doors. You make your choices. You decide to go through doors that are open, or you decide to wait. When your destiny calls, when the vision grabs you, the faith fills you, the task beckons, you answer. You decide. No one will invite you. No one will give you instructions. No one will tell you, "Now is the time." It is your door. You decide to enter or not.

Sam Keen in his book, *To a Dancing God*, wrote, "To take a vow is an awful risk. As is not taking a vow. We must choose where we will allow ourselves to tremble. We must decide which gods we will allow to be born. This is the burden and joy of human freedom." William Witte in *The News*, wrote, "We all take chances in life, and the better and more God-fearing people take the longest chances, for they stake their lives on many intangibles and invisibles. They are willing to risk the present and the near, for the future and the distant. They dare to bet their lives on God's way of self-sacrifice." Dare to bet your life on God's plan which is your destiny.

This morning, even as I speak, the San Francisco 49ers are battling in the playoffs. One of the most successful place kickers in the NFL is Ray Wersching of the 49ers. Ray has a peculiar habit that makes him unique to all other kickers. When preparing to kick, Ray does not look at the goal posts. Instead, Ray depends on his teammate who holds the ball to point him in the right direction. It's not that Ray is superstitious about looking at the goal posts. The fact is, his eyesight is so poor he can't see them clearly anyway and he has wisely learned to rely on his holder, to trust his holder for proper direction.

At the beginning of this new year, we can't see the goal posts at the end of the year either. Wise are they who rely on the supreme holder to guide them in the right direction. In 1987 keep your eye on Jesus Christ who will unfold your destiny and empower you with God's love so that you may live out God's plan. Happy New Year!

DESTINED IN LOVE

EPHESIANS 1:3-10

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