



17th Sunday after Pentecost
24th September 2023

What does it look like to "live out what God is working in?"

Main verses:

"... continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose."
(Philippians 2:12b-13)

In the spring of 1980, Rosie Ruiz was the first woman to cross the finish line of the Boston Marathon, in an amazing 2 hours and 30 minutes. She had the winner's wreath placed on her head, the gold medal around her neck and was surrounded by cameras and cheering. She was completely unknown in the world of running. An incredible feat!

Questions began to surface. Why had no one seen her along the 26.2 mile course? Even the front runners? Then someone noticed cellulite on her legs. These were not the legs of an athlete! Nor was there any sweat on her brow, or fatigue in her step.

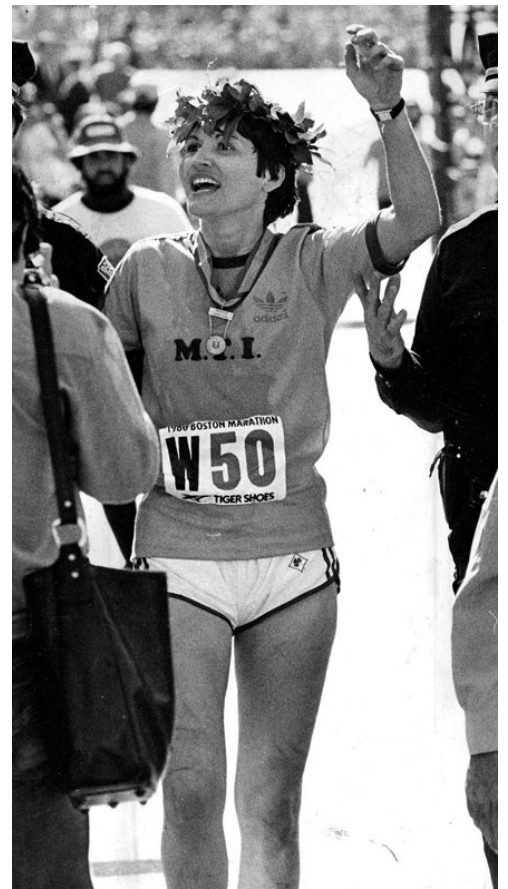
The truth finally came out: she had jumped into the race during the last half mile.

When confronted, Rosie never admitted her fraud. In fact, she repeatedly said that she would run another marathon to validate her ability – but, somehow she never did.

In reading about Rosie, she reminds me of people I know who want to get to the finish line, but who cleverly arrange not to run the race. Not to put in the hours of spiritual training. Not to wear the appropriate attire, our garment of righteousness.

Not properly fuel their soul with the right nutrients of God's word, so as to be prepared for hours of endurance that the race demands. These fence jumpers come and warm the pews in church on Sunday wreathed in smiles. They enter the celebration, bow their heads in humility, but there is no deep spiritual life behind the smiles, nor does God's truth fill their heart or their mouth.

They may engage in acts of service and compassion in public, appearing godly and committed.



But on closer inspection, there is no sweat on their brow – because they've not been running the race throughout the week, believing through the hard times, praying through the lonely, angry, hurting hours. They have no sense of what real faith is, because they've never stepped out in risky trust of God. They may look like a follower of Jesus Christ on the outside, but inwardly they are just a pew warmer.

The Christian life will always involve going through dark and difficult places. There will be seasons of wrestling with serious doubts. They'll be nights of crying out to God in desperation and heartache, and days when it seems as though our heavenly Father is wearing earmuffs.

Keeping a pew warm on a Sunday morning won't sustain you during these seasons. The only thing that will carry you through, is the knowledge that Jesus Christ, your Saviour, is both with you and His Spirit is in you.

When someone who has no inward experience of God is asked the question, "What is God doing in your life?" they will stare at you blankly, with no idea how to answer.

So, today I'd like us to focus on what it means to "live out what God is working in you?"

Or how to answer that question.

Paul wrote, "*continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.*" (Philippians 2:12b-13)

As we spoke about a few weeks ago, God began a good work in you when you received Christ, at which time the seed of the Spirit of Christ was deposited into your heart. The seed of the Spirit of God was 'worked in', and as we learnt a few weeks ago, God's Spirit continues to work in our lives until Jesus returns.

It may help to read the New Living Translation of this verse,

"Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him." (Philippians 2:12-13 NLT)

So, to put it in spiritual language, when the seed of the Spirit of Christ was planted in our heart, a tree of righteousness began to grow, and its branches were designed to produce the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, patience, goodness, faithfulness and self-control.

Now when we hear the phrase 'work hard', we mustn't think it means we work *for* our salvation. Rather, we are diligent to train our hearts so that our lives begin to show the results *of* our salvation. And the result of our salvation is obedience, a deep reverence for God, and the experience of God's transformation.

Notice Paul said, "*it is God's Spirit who gives us the desire and power to do what will please our Heavenly Father*".

In other words, it is God's desire is for us to be transformed to the image of His Son Jesus that we would begin to live and behave like Jesus did during His earthly ministry. So, the person who knows God's work in their lives will answer the question "What is God doing?" "Why I know that he is changing me to be more like Jesus.

He is teaching me:

- to love sinful people just as Jesus loves sinful people;
- to pray for the sick to be healed, because Jesus did;
- to live holy and pure lives because Jesus showed me how to; and
- to offer forgiveness to those who hurt me, because Jesus showed me forgiveness."

And they can probably pinpoint exactly what area of holiness God has his finger on!

For God to accomplish His greater work *through* us, He must do a deeper work *in* us.

Working *out* what God has worked *in* isn't the result of strenuous effort or striving alone.

I love the way the Amplified Bible translates this verse: "[Not in your own strength] for it is God Who is all the while effectually at work in you [energizing and creating in you the power and desire], both to will and to work for His good pleasure and satisfaction and delight."

Aren't you glad it's not a matter of will power but God's power?

And not only does God give us the power to do what pleases Him, but He also gives us the desire to do it. If God left us alone, our desires would degenerate into attitudes of self-serving, pride, which is saturated with sin.

And even if we have the desire to do good, without God's Spirit we feel powerless to carry it out. But through the Holy Spirit, God is working in us.

The Greek word there for "working" can also be understood as "energy."

That means those who have the Holy Spirit residing in their heart have divine energy to accomplish everything God has designed you to do! He energizes you by the Holy Spirit!

The same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead lives within you and me and is at work within us to give us new desires and power to do what pleases God! This is the secret to a changed and joyful life!

Now, when we step into the parable which Jesus shared today, it is almost as though Jesus was teaching the opposite to what I'm saying. It sounds like he is advocating that just before we get close to the end of our life, we can quickly jump over the barrier, run to the finish line and take the winner's crown of salvation - like Rosie did - with no necessity to put in spiritual training and discipline.

But it would be misleading to turn the God's gracious gift of salvation into an escape plan that's available whenever you feel you need it!

The parable of the vineyard workers teaches us about God's offer of extravagant grace toward everyone, so that they receive the reward of eternal life, even if it is accepted right at the end of a person's life.

However, notice that in Jesus' story, the landowner called for workers at 9 am, at noon, at three, and finally at 5 pm - in other words the call came while it was still day - while there was an opportunity to respond. But, when evening came, the opportunity to work in God's field ended. At that point, the foreman gathered all the workers who had responded to the landowner's call, so they could receive their wages, only to discover they all received the same. (Matthew 20:8).

This call in the evening is symbolic for the final call of judgement (see 1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

Paul wrote, *"As God's co-workers we urge you not to accept this marvellous gift of God's kindness and grace and then ignore it. For he says, "At just the right time, I heard you. On the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation."* (2 Corinthians 6:1-2 New Living Translation)

No one knows the day they will die. And after death comes the judgment (Hebrews 9:27). So we are to respond to God's gracious invitation when the call comes, whatever hour - at the beginning in the middle or near the end. And once we've responded, and God's Spirit is given to us, we live out and speak about all the good things God is working in our lives so we shine like joyful lights although we live in a dark and grumpy world.

Philippians Devotional – Week 3

We move on further into chapter 2 of Paul's letter to the Philippians. If you'd like a copy of the devotional, printed versions are in the church foyer or the devotional may be downloaded from the church's website.

