

Milestones along the Journey

Introduction: What is a milestone?

Milestones are markers put along roadsides to help travelers know the distance they have come and how far they have to go. These are useful for knowing where you are at in your journey and anticipating when you will arrive at your destination.

Milestones are also important events in our lives that mark the end of one stage and the beginning of another in our life's journeys. Think about some of the most basic milestones in our lives: birth of a child, start of school, getting Driver's license, first job, graduation, first apartment, marriage, promotions, moves, retirement, subscription to AARP (lol), significant anniversaries, and many others.

And then consider some milestones of the Christian Journey: Child dedication, baptism, call to ministry, first time reading the Bible through, overcoming a particular sin, making it through a particularly difficult place in life with the help of God, success in leading a person to Christ, success in a missional outreach, success in meeting and sharing with neighbors, and others.

This morning we are celebrating two incredibly important milestones that signify the end of one era and the beginning of another. We are celebrating the Baptism of Randi Nichols, which is a public declaration of faith and commitment to Jesus Christ and signals the beginning of intentional Christian discipleship. And we are celebrating the high school graduations of Pete Kratz and Sarah Painter, which stands as the conclusion of high school and points to the beginning of young adulthood as experienced in college or a career.

Why do milestones matter?

Milestones are meant to help us move from one stage in our journey to the next. Oftentimes they are celebrated with certain 'rites of passage' that help to close out a chapter and welcome the next. For Jewish boys and girls, bar-mitzvahs and bat-mitzvahs are rites of passage that celebrate entering manhood and womanhood. For many, high school graduations are rites-of-passage that celebrate the ending of school and the beginning of young adulthood.

Milestones, in some ways force us to reckon with the fact that change has happened and that we need to adjust to that change and next stage. Both 'life' milestones and 'faith' milestones are important because they develop, inform, and influence our faith journeys. What are the significant milestones in the life of a Christian, how do we mark them, and how do they help us to move ahead in our journeys?

Transition: We find meaning in milestones not only because of what happens during the event itself, but also in what we do before to get ready and after to remember. This morning, we are going to journey into the book of Exodus during the time when Israel was enslaved by the Egyptians and take a closer at the Passover, which was a milestone event in the lives of God's people and is still celebrated by Jewish people today. Specifically, we are going to look at three

elements of the Passover that helped to make it such a milestone event: how they prepared, how they marked the event, and how they remembered the event.

Elements of Biblical Milestones: Passover

a. Preparation

Exodus 12:3-7:

³Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. ⁴If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat. ⁵The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. ⁶Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the members of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. ⁷Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs.

If you remember the story, Moses, who was born of a Hebrew woman but raised by the daughter of the Pharaoh, had been exiled from the land after the secret of his heritage was discovered and after he murdered an Egyptian. He then returned to Egypt after being commanded by God, in order to get Pharaoh to release of the Hebrew people. Up to this point God had sent 9 plagues in order to prove his power and to get Pharaoh to understand that he was no match for God. And every time Pharaoh's heart was hardened. The last plague that was coming was that God was going to send his angel throughout Egypt to kill every firstborn child, male and female, who wasn't under the protection of a house that had the blood of a lamb painted on its doorframe.

God has Moses tell the Hebrew people to prepare themselves for the coming of the angel by sacrificing a year old male lamb without defect at twilight and to take some of the blood and put it around the doorframe. God's instructions were very specific, which tells me how important preparation is. In fact, the angel passing over any person's house was contingent on them actually following the preparation. So, if we are going to experience a milestone as we should, then we need to spend time in preparation.

To get ready for her baptism, Randi spent time not only reading her Bible about what baptism is, but she also spent time reading about the history of the Mennonite Church so that she understood and knew what she was committing to. She also talked at length with her friends and family and met with Erin and myself. And In a short while, we are going to hear some words from Randi about how God has been working in her life in such a way that she has decided to be baptized, and we are going to hear her public confession of faith as a witness to Jesus' influence in her life, all in part to prepare her for baptism.

There are other ways that we prepare for milestones; for graduation, students have to make sure that they have completed all of their classes, have paid all of their school fees, have ordered their caps and gowns, and oftentimes have to go to practice. When two people decide

to get married, beyond even all of the actual planning for the day itself, they do pre-marital counseling and ask the important questions of themselves, how do they want to handle finances, who is going to do what chores, how is church and faith going to play a part in their relationship, and do they want to be parents, and if so when?

For a milestone and do its growing work in us, we need to begin with preparation.

b. Marking the event

During or directly after a significant event, God's people would mark the milestone symbolically to as a response to God's goodness, God's presence, and God's support. They did this by offering sacrifices, having feasts, repenting, dedicating themselves to God, through covenants, and through signs. Sometimes parents would give their children a name that reminded them of the event, and sometimes God even changed the person's name, like Abram to Abraham, Saul to Paul, and Cephas to Peter.

During the Passover, the Hebrews were commanded to cook and eat a meal to mark the event.

Exodus 12:8-11: ⁸That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. ⁹Do not eat the meat raw or boiled in water, but roast it over a fire—with the head, legs and internal organs. ¹⁰Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it. ¹¹*This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord's Passover.*

The way they were to eat the meal was a symbolic action not only to represent the haste in preparing for the coming angel, but it also foreshadowed what was going to come with their flight from Egypt into the desert.

We mark baptism with the action of immersion in water, not only because it is the way that Jesus was baptized and how he instructed us to baptize others, but also because it symbolizes aligning ourselves with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. When we get put under the water, it is like a death to our old way of living, we are then buried under the water with Jesus, and when we are raised out of the water it is like we are being raised with Jesus into a new life of discipleship. We mark weddings with an exchange of rings, we mark the birth of children with naming, and we mark graduations, retirements, and anniversaries with parties. Marking milestones is important because it gives us a touchstone to acknowledge and respond to God's work through the event.

c. Remembering the event

Important events in the Bible, events that affected the lives of God's people, were often called to be remembered by future generations. When God made a promise to Noah that he would never again destroy the world by a flood, he created rainbows as a sign for all future generations not only to remember the event of the Great flood but to remember God's promise. God instructed the Hebrews that every year after Passover the people would hold a

feast to commemorate how God had shown his love for his people and had saved them from slavery in Egypt.

Exodus 12:12-14

¹² “On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. ¹³ The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt. ¹⁴ “This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord—a lasting ordinance.

Jewish people begin the commemoration of Passover with a traditional meal called a Seder that utilized food items to retell the story of the Exodus from Egypt. A traditional Seder plate has 6 items on it: bitter herbs to remind them of the bitterness of slavery, charoset, which is a sweet mixture of chopped nuts, apples, cinnamon, and red wine to remind them of the mortar and bricks used to build Egyptian storehouses and pyramids, Karpas, a vegetable that is dipped into salt water to represent tears and reminds them of hope and rebirth, a roasted lamb shankbone to symbolize the lamb sacrificed for the blood on the doorposts, and a roasted hard-boiled egg which was to remind the people of the destruction of the temple.

How do we remember our milestones? We celebrate birthdays and anniversaries, we have high school and college reunions, and some people remember and celebrate their baptism day as their ‘re-birth’ day. In the cycle of the church year, we have rituals around Christmas and Easter to remember Jesus’ birth, life, death, and resurrection. Taking time to remember our milestones is important because it reminds us where we have been, how God has led us to where we are, and it forces us to ask the question, where is God taking us now?

*Right now, we are going to hear some ‘remembrances’ from Pete and from (Anna Kauffman) reading on behalf of Sarah Painter about how God has led them through their time in high school and formed them into who they are today. *Thank you Peter and Anna!

Conclusion:

Take a moment to think back to your own milestones. In what ways have they formed your life and faith journey, taking you from one stage to the next? In what ways have they taught you new things about yourselves and God? In what ways have they showed you of God’s goodness and grace in your life? How have you marked those milestones? How do you remember them? And how do they point to where God is leading you now? Think about the milestones in the life of the church. How has God worked through those events and stages and how might they show us where he is leading this church in her next stage of the journey? God is always at work in us, from birth to death, and along the way there are milestones in which we can clearly see Him at work in us. How are we preparing ourselves for the next milestone, how are we marking the important events, and how do we remember His work that has already happened?