

**Dare to Dream – Perseverance**

**A message from**

**Reverend Rebecca Trefz**

**Dakotas Conference**

**Director of Ministries**

Just keep swimming, just keep swimming, just keep swimming, swimming, swimming…These words were made famous by a cute little blue fish named Dori in the movie, “Finding Nemo.” They were her sweet, simple words of encouragement for her friend, Marlin, who was feeling like giving up on their quest to find his son. Her words align with her optimistic, if somewhat simplistic, outlook on life—an outlook that may in part stem from the fact that she had short-term memory loss and forgot things within a few moments of them happening. But although Marlin—and maybe many of us—might find this outlook and this phrase naïve, I believe they are also words that can be helpful to repeat to each other and ourselves on this journey of life and faith.

This week, we turn to our final chapter in our Lenten study entitled, “Perseverance.” It seems to be a fitting chapter to end on because we know, when seeking to follow Jesus and live out God’s dream and purpose for our lives, things don’t always work out in the way we planned. We face roadblocks and pushback—internally and externally. We face some challenges that are expected and others that seem to come out of nowhere and knock the wind out of us. And we face setbacks that make us question if we’re on the right path altogether. So when we’re seeking to live out our purpose and the mission God has for us, how do we persevere through these challenges? How do we “just keep swimming…”?

Well, to begin with, I think we need to expect pushback on this mission. I think sometimes we think, because we’re following God’s plan for our lives or answering God’s call, it should all work out, right? But the truth is, when we’re living life on a mission for Christ, that’s exactly when we should expect pushback—spiritual and temporal. The last thing the enemy wants is for people to break out of their spiritual status quo and live beyond themselves and what they thought was possible, knowing that isn’t about having a negative outlook or expecting bad things to happen. It’s about being prepared to face them—to pray for an army of angels to stand with us—to invite others to pray for us—and to expect that God’s promise to us in *Romans 5* is true—“that suffering (challenges, setbacks) produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope; and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” (Romans 5:3b-5)

Of course, even as we expect we will face challenges, we must also prepare ourselves for these challenges by keeping our sight clear.

You know, one of the realities that came with turning 40 this year was the fact that I could no longer deny that I needed reading glasses—all the time. I’m still getting used to this fact so I have many Dollar store pairs lying around—at home, at the office, in the car, in my purse. I’m not the best at taking care of them (hence the Dollar Store) and so they tend to get dirty and smudged and scratched quite often. Needless to say, they don’t serve their purpose very well when they look like this and taking the time to clean them—or replace them—makes a world of difference in my ability to see what’s before me.

*Matthew 6:22-23* tells us, “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness.” I think this metaphor is so true. If our outlook on life—on our mission, on the church, on the people God has surrounded us with—is dark or hopeless or cynical it will suck the life out of our mission and purpose. But if we take the time to “clean” it or “replace” that outlook—if we fix our sight on our belief that God who began a good work in us will be faithful to complete it (*Phil. 1:6*) and that with God all things are possible (*Matt 19:26*) and that Jesus chose us for a mission and purpose that would bear lasting fruit (*John 15:16*), then we will better be able to see where God is calling us to next and all the things—the people, the blessings—God has already provided to help us get there.

But in order to keep our sight filled with that light, in order to persevere, we also need to be proactive and intentional in taking time to go to the mountain.

We all have busy lives—jobs, families, obligations that demand our time and attention. And it’s easy to have our focus pulled down and in—just gotta get through the next week or the next month; just gotta get this and that checked off my to-do list; just gotta keep all my ducks in a row and everyone happy. With that kind of downward, hectic focus it’s easy to lose sight of that bigger vision and purpose God has for us. As the book describes—and more importantly, as Jesus modeled—sometimes we need to step out of the routine, go to that literal or metaphorical mountain and seek God. We go there to seek God’s bigger vision for our life, for our family, for our church. We go there to seek God’s clarity on the next steps or next levels for that vision. We go there to be reminded to “just keep swimming”—to continue to follow Christ—no matter what obstacles we face—and to live out the dream he has for our lives and our world.

**