

“Evaluating the Calling”

Acts 5:27-32

Psalm 150

Revelation 1:4-8

John 20:19-31

It’s all about Jesus. Because of Jesus’ death on the cross and resurrection from the dead, there is a new way of living available to you. On this Second Sunday of Easter, the Psalmist declares, “Let everything that breathes praise the LORD!”¹ Each person has a calling. Your calling, my calling is to love God, love others, and make disciples. Can you affirm that today? If so, say with the Psalmist, “Let everything that breathes praise the LORD!” Living your calling by loving God, loving others, and making disciples in your words and actions is imperative for praise to well up from deep within your soul.

My friend Jan Peery, the President, and CEO at the YWCA in Oklahoma City, relates the following experience of a good friend of hers:

I went to the pharmacy the other day to get a prescription filled. While I was standing outside waiting for them to fill it a young man come walking by. He looked up at me nodded his head and said hi. I nodded back and said “Hey, how’s it going?” He said, “I would be lying to you if I told you good. I have to go in here and get my Suboxone and the minute you say that everybody looks at you like you’re scum of the Earth.” Now, he didn’t look scary or strung out like the addicts they show on TV, but he did look defeated. A few minutes later I went back in and sat down in a chair and was waiting when I heard him talking to the pharmacist. He said, “I’m trying to get my life straightened out. I’ve made a few bad decisions but I’m trying.” The pharmacist is being very professional he never took his eyes off the computer while he was asking questions not once did, he change facial expressions or tone of voice, but I noticed other people looking at him as if he was a leper. He said again, “I’m really not a bad person I just made some mistakes.” Then to my surprise he looked down at his feet and in a half, mumble said, “My Momma loves me.” At that moment I didn’t see a struggling addict I

¹Psalm 150:6

saw a child that was hurt and scared and felt all alone. A child reaching his arms out for someone to pick him up and make it all better. That image was so clear in my mind that it broke my heart. The pharmacist told him what the cost was, and another disappointed look came over the young man's face. Again, I saw a child that just found out he had been left behind. He said, "I'm sorry I thought it would only be five or six dollars I don't have that much." I stepped up behind him and said, "I'll cover the rest of it." He turned around with a shocked look on his face and I repeated "I'll cover the rest." He said, "No man you don't have to do that." I looked at the pharmacist and said I'll cover the rest of it. The young man looked at me but had no words. I said, "You don't have to say anything just take care of yourself." I placed the money in his hand and walked back over and sat down. It didn't take long for somebody to make their way over to me and say, "You shouldn't give them money you better go get it back." I replied, "That's between me and him and what he does with it is between him and God."

The friend continues, "I didn't tell you this because I did something special the money wasn't that much. I'm telling you this because for the first time I realized how judgmental we all are. All of us live in a neighborhood full of drug addicts. But for the first time I realized that they're a victim of a bad decision. How many of us have made bad decisions? How many of us thought that we could make that big car payment, we could afford that big, beautiful house, that we could gamble just this once? How many people thought they could watch a little porn? These too are all bad decisions, and they can have devastating effects on our lives and the lives of those close to you. Do I look at all these people the same way I do an addict? Here lately I've seen a lot of that little kid in all the faces I see. What a wakeup call. If someone is trying to do better, if they're doing the right things, we need to build them up not tear them down. None of us have clean hands when it comes to making bad choices, some choices are just more complex than others...."²

What does living our calling look like when it comes from a place praise rooted in gratitude to God for all that you are because of God's hope, peace, joy, and love in your life? Jan Peery has just given us one example.

The story of the early Christian community in the book of Acts manifests courage and freedom which is transformative. That early community of Christians challenged the status quo. Acts 5:27-32 narrates a confrontation between Peter and the apostles and the high priest. The

²Jan Peery's Facebook page, April 19, 2022.

high priest had given them strict orders not to teach and preach in the name of Jesus. It was a threat to the high priest and the religious establishment. And the high priest challenged Peter to explain why he and the apostles did not do what they were told. Acts 5:29 reads, “But Peter and the apostles answered, ‘We must obey God rather than human authority.’” They were teaching the power of the cross and resurrection for a new way for everyone to live. Peter and the apostles had courage to bring people transformation from bondage to apathy, disbelief, self-absorption, and powerless religion through the good news of the gospel.

John 20:19-31 depicts the disciples in bondage to fear and skepticism. On that evening of the resurrection, the disciples were afraid and “playing it safe.” They hid behind locked doors. Jesus, aware of the disciples’ fear, appeared to them by walking through the locked doors. He said to them, “Peace be with you.” Jesus said it two times. It was the risen Jesus, the Jesus with nail holes in his hands and feet. The usage of the Greek word for peace ειρήνη, has both common and uncommon meanings. Its common meaning is simply a greeting for the day. Its uncommon meaning is the epitome of the blessings of the kingdom of God that are realized in the redemptive deeds of the incarnate Son of God. Everyone but Thomas was there that evening. A week later, Jesus again came through the locked doors. He greeted the disciples saying, “Peace be with you.” Thomas demanded to see the nail marks in Jesus’ hands and put his hand into his side. Jesus told Thomas to touch him, stop doubting, and believe.

By placing our faith in Jesus, we begin to receive peace. Jesus’ victory over death shows us the way to conquer fear, apathy, disbelief, self-absorption, and powerless religion. Faith leads us to participate in Christ’s resurrection. How? We offer ourselves to God in praise. With the psalmist we proclaim, “Praise the LORD! ...Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him

according to his surpassing greatness.”³ Tim Keller tells the following story about the power of Christ’s resurrection:

A minister was in Italy, and there he saw the grave of a man who had died centuries before who was an unbeliever and completely against Christianity...So the man had a huge stone slab put over his grave so he would not have to be raised from the dead in case there is a resurrection from the dead. He had inscriptions put all over the slab saying, ‘I do not want to be raised from the dead. I don’t believe in it.’ Evidently, when he was buried, an acorn must have fallen into the grave. So, a hundred years later the acorn had grown up through the grave and split that slab. It was now a tall, towering oak tree. The minister looked at it and asked, “If an acorn, which has power of biological life in it, can split a slab of that magnitude, what can the acorn of God’s resurrection power do in a person’s life?”

Keller comments:

The minute you decide to receive Jesus as Savior and Lord, the power of the Holy Spirit comes into your life. It’s the power of the resurrection—the same thing that raised Jesus from the dead Think of the things you see as immovable slabs in your life—your bitterness, your insecurity, your fears, your self-doubts. Those things can be split and rolled off. The more you know him, the more you grow into the power of the resurrection.⁴

The Christian faith is based on two premises: the redeeming power of the cross and the triumphal power of the resurrection.

John’s words to the seven churches in Revelation 1:4-8 is a captivating description of grace that is timeless, present, past, and future. Revelation 1:4 reads, “Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come...” Jesus is the faithful witness to the redeeming power of the cross and the triumphal power of the resurrection. The redeeming power of the cross and the triumphal power of the resurrection are transformative through faith in Jesus. Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last...the beginning and the end. All life that

³Psalm 150:1-2

⁴Keller illustration cited by Nancy Guthrie, editor, *Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross* (Crossway, 2009), 136.

is worth living is bookended with Jesus. Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters in the Greek alphabet.⁵

Death was defeated at the cross and resurrection. Death, the end of all life as we know it, the destroyer of all dreams, the breaker of all hopes, the crushing burden of all life, and the loss of all love was defeated. Its power has been broken.⁶

It's all about Jesus, my friends. Like Jan Peery and Thomas, pursue Jesus with courageous living of your calling. God will lead you to faith or a renewed faith. Evaluate your calling. Be a person loving God, loving others, and making disciples in your words and deeds. Amen.

This sermon was preached (for the In-Person, Online, and Village TV 6 congregations) on Sunday, 24 April 2022 by the Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh in the Sanctuary at Geneva Presbyterian Church in Laguna Woods, California

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⁶Some concepts gleaned from James C. Goodloe's sermon "Why Seek the Living Among the Dead?" preached on January 15, 2006.