

## “Further Preparing For Living The Calling”

Isaiah 43:16-21

Psalm 126

Philippians 3:4b-14

John 12:1-8

God’s actions of salvation are God’s not ours. As you recall from last week’s sermon, when you experience the gospel, that is salvation, which the Bible illumines, Christ exposes, and grace captures, you will live the calling you have received. That calling is to persist in the work of reconciliation (salvation). The cycle of preparing for and living the calling is repetitive and ongoing. The ongoing process of conversion (reconciliation, salvation) reveals the new creation you are. Listen to the following illustration of how change, although not popular, can happen.

In 1523, an English animal trainer named John Fitzherbert said, “The dog must be trained when he is a whelp, or else it will not be [trained]; for it is hard to make an old dog [find a new scent].” Today, we’ve summarized his insight into this well-known adage: “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks.” It sounds good, but is it true? A show on the Discovery Channel called Mythbusters likes to take timeworn adages like this one and see if they’re true or false. So MythBusters’ hosts Jamie Hyneman and Adam Savage decided to go after this one, too. They found a pair of aging Alaskan malamutes who didn’t know a single trick in the book. Malamutes are known for their stubbornness. As 7-year-old canines, siblings Bobo and Cece were equivalent to a couple of 50-year-olds in dog years, arguably qualifying them for the “old dog” category. After four days of training, Bobo and Cece proved Fitzherbert flat wrong. Each could heel, sit, lie down, stay, and shake upon command from Jamie and Adam. Their conclusion: Myth busted. You can teach old dogs’ new tricks.<sup>1</sup>

Ongoing preparation for living the calling is necessary because change is always engaging us.

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<sup>1</sup>Source: Mythbusters Database, “Is It Possible to Teach an Old Dog New Tricks,” Discovery Channel.

Jonathan Edwards, the great 18<sup>th</sup> century Reformed theologian preaching on Isaiah 43, notes, "...there yet remains...to be accomplished, in bringing the whole world to Christian faith and settling the world in that state of light, peace and holiness..."<sup>2</sup> Can the church...can individual followers of Jesus learn to be evangelists, sharers of good news? We must because that is what living the calling is all about.

Isaiah sees God doing a new thing. It doesn't take much reflection to come up with barriers that are in place to stop humanity from living in light and peace. Hate, anger, chaos, arrogance, posturing and the like have raised their ugly heads. The human spirit is motivated by control and fear these days. We need a new thing and Christians can lead the way. Isaiah uses the image of water as a barrier to moving forward. For the Israelites, the Red Sea was a barrier, but God parted the Red Sea and after the people of God passed through, the water captured Pharaoh's army. When the Israelites faced the barrier of the water and began to walk through the barrier, they experienced God moving them forward in their calling and conversion. Isaiah 43:18-19 reads, "Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert."

In Psalm 126, we see the people of God leaning into God's promise to Abraham that they would be a great people. Psalm 126:3 reads, "The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced." For the people of God, Psalm 126 was used as part of their journey

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<sup>2</sup>Jonathan Edwards in his sermon "They Sing a New Song." Found in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, volume 22, edited by Harry S. Stout and Nathan O. Hatch, with Kyle P. Farley (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 231.

to Jerusalem for Passover. We can use it doing our journey in Lent leading to Easter. For both the people of God then and now, we are to be on a journey with God.

Philippians 3:4b-14 is significant for our examination of further preparing for living the calling. We must be rooted in today, but also envision the new thing that God is doing. Paul is writing to the Christians at the church in Philippi. He was in prison waiting to be executed. This letter to the Philippian Christians asks them to look at their past, examine their present, but also envision that God is leading them as they grow as new creations in Christ. Paul warns the Philippians and warns us that confidence in the flesh is destructive. Philippians 3:13-14 reads, “Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it on my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Jesus Christ.” In this regard, William Greenway writes, “The goal of Christian spirituality is one’s own imitation of the spirit of Christ celebrated in the kenosis hymn, a spirit of compassion and sympathy, a spirit which leads to a life that remains faithful to loving action of others, even unto death.”<sup>3</sup> This citation from Greenway emboldens the commitment for further preparation in living the calling with reflection in the now, but not yet of conversion/salvation.

The text in John 12:1-8 is quite insightful for our journey with God. Even Mary wanted to grow, change in her journey with God. Her extravagance of anointing Jesus’s feet with expensive perfume overcame the barrier of Judas’ rejection that she was being wasteful. Mary could only give her best to Jesus in that he offered her a new way to live.

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<sup>3</sup>William Greenway in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery and Cynthia L. Rigby, editors, *Connections, Year C, Volume 2* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 102

Jesus said to Judas in Mary's earshot in John 12:7-8, "Leave her alone... You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." Believing in Jesus is strange, because it means listening to his voice and heeding his values...defying government as savior and embracing him as the only one who can save. Jesus is the only one who invites us to journey with him from the now into more of the not yet.

We are living in a time of great uncertainty. As individuals and a church, we must make a clear assessment of our losses and gains in the way we are currently doing things. As you approach Holy Week and the impact of the seven last words of Christ on the cross for your movement forward into the future of resurrection, you must ask this question. Do you know what the seven last words of the church are? We've never done it that way before.

As Christians, we must turn the barriers of rigid fundamentalism into stepping-stones into living the calling which the gospel demonstrates: the message of the Bible is salvation; belief in Jesus Christ saves us from ourselves and false saviors; our assurance of salvation is not based on merit, only grace. Peter J. Gomes former Plummer Professor of Christian Morals writes, "We Christians, especially those of us who share a Protestant and an evangelical faith, need a bigger God that goes against the conventional wisdom of our little faith. With such a God we need fear nothing the future has to offer..."<sup>4</sup>

Experiencing life as a new creation in Christ is the only way to go.

Lean into God making you a new creation. Reorient your sense of time to God's time. Lean into the gospel which the Bible illumines, Christ exposes, and grace captures. Then, you will live the calling you have received. Some might become reawakened in

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<sup>4</sup>Peter J. Gomes, *The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus*, (New York City, New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 158.

their Christian faith and practices while others may even become Christian. Further prepare to live your calling. Life changes through reconciliation, conversion, and salvation.<sup>5</sup> Go for it!! Amen!

*This sermon was preached (for the In-Person, Online, and Village TV 6 congregations) on Sunday, 03 April 2022 by the Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh in the Sanctuary at Geneva Presbyterian Church in Laguna Woods, California*

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