

“Reflecting On The Calling”

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

Psalm 27

Philippians 3:17-4:1

Luke 13:31-35

We have a propensity to resist leaning into Geneva’s Mission Statement, “to remember, tell, and live the way of Jesus by being just, kind, and humble.” The calling we have as Christians is to embrace and be embraced by the good news of the Gospel and God’s mission of redemption. And we are to do this fearlessly and beyond imposed boundaries. Oswald Chambers writes, “Our calling is not primarily to be holy men and women, but to be proclaimers of the gospel of God. The one all-important thing is that the gospel of God should be recognized as the abiding reality. Reality is not human goodness, or holiness, or heaven, or hell— it is redemption.”¹

Adolf Sannwald was a German national. He also graduated from Harvard Divinity School. Sannwald was killed while serving in the German army on the eastern front, in the campaign against Russia. Adolf Sannwald’s name appears on the wall of honor at Harvard. There is an asterisk by his name which reads “enemy casualty.” When Sannwald was a minister in the German Lutheran Church in the 1930’s, like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Sannwald preached against the Nazi Party. He was arrested, drafted into the German army, and sent to the eastern front. Adolf Sannwald was not an “enemy casualty.” He was a follower of Jesus who was “sentenced to death” by the Nazi party for preaching the gospel of what Jesus would do. Sannwald asked himself the question, what

¹Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (Westwood, New Jersey: Barbour and Company Inc, by permission from Dodd Mead & Company, Inc, 1935), 21.

would Jesus have me do?²

In Genesis 15, God makes two promises to Abram; an heir from his own body and a land. Abram was old. He and Sarai were beyond childbearing years. Abram and Sarai were migrants from Mesopotamia, modern day Iraq. The historical region also includes the Persian Gulf and southeast Turkey, west Iran, northeastern Syria, and northern Kuwait. Abram believed God.

Like Abram, we are called to believe against all odds. Like Abram, we too, are migrants. Like Abram, we too, are aliens in a strange land. God made a covenant with Abram; a binding promise that would be and remain true, regardless of Abram's behavior. The covenant God made with Abram was unilateral; a covenant between a stronger and weaker partner. A unilateral covenant was based on the idea that there was something the stronger could gain from the weaker partner. In Abram's day, the stronger partner in a covenant was usually after water rights, land to graze his herds on, or something else that would benefit the stronger. In Genesis 15, God is the one making the unilateral obligation of covenant. What is God going to get out of the covenant with Abram? God gets someone to bless. God says in Genesis 15:1, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." The reward is not earned. It is given to those who are willing to receive.

The text in Luke drives home this point of a unilateral covenant that God has made for God's people. In the text, some Pharisees came to Jesus and told him to leave Jerusalem since Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, wanted to kill him. Jesus replied directly in Luke 13:32, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and

²Adapted from Peter J. Gomes, *The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus* (New York City, New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 72.

performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will finish my work.” In Hellenistic thought, “the fox is regarded not as clever, but sly and unprincipled.”³ Jesus needed to suffer, die, and be raised from the dead for the sake of creation’s redemption.

Psalm 27:13 reads, “Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!” In God all things are possible. We are not to be passive in God’s mission but to fully participate that is be active in God’s work of salvation. And “waiting” is key to being active in our calling to participate in God’s mission of salvation. Philippians 3:17, 18 and 4:1 read, “Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us....But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.....Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.” When we wait on God we engage in active listening. When we connect with other Christians, we engage in becoming more like Jesus.⁴

Yes, all things are ordained by God and will work out for those who love the Lord. How you may ask? Sacrifice on behalf of the least of these, which requires a way of seeing the common good has a higher priority than the self and what it wants when it wants it. In this way we remember, tell, and live the way of Jesus, by being just, kind, and humble. Abram’s faith in God mattered. We, like Abram, live in the borderlands of belief and unbelief. To ask the question, “What would Jesus have me do?” our faith must rest

³Leslie J. Hoppe in David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, editors, *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 2* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 71.

⁴I am grateful for the thinking and writing of Carolyn J. Sharp, William Greenway, J. Clinton McCann Jr., Barbara K. Lundblad, Anna B. Olson, Shively T. J. Smith, and James C. Howell 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), 40-42, 42-44, 45-47, 48-50, 50-51, 52-54, and 54-56.

upon the reliability of God, not upon the changing feelings of the human heart. You were created to become like Jesus and made to participate in God's mission.

The journey to the cross, the focus of Lent and Holy Week, is not only about piety, prayer, and obedience. Being a follower of Jesus is those things and more. Following Jesus is a political journey as well. Our allegiance to him is above all else. If we stick close to Jesus, we too will be distressed over the things that brings grief over God's created order and mission of redemption. We too are broken by the things that break the heart of God. There are enough resources in the world to take care of all 7.4 billion of the earth's inhabitants. No one needs to be homeless. No one needs to be hungry. No one needs to be without clean water. No one needs to die through abuses of power that have no end game other than to cause undo pain and suffering.

You have been chosen. You have been called. You are the very presence of God in a hurting world for the redemption of someone, somewhere, at some time. This describes loving God, loving others, and making disciples. Like Adolf Sannwald, followers of Jesus bring hope, peace, joy, and love into the world. Just ask the question, "What would Jesus have me do?" Amen!

*This sermon was preached (for the In-Person, Online, and Village TV 6 congregations)
on Transfiguration of the Lord Sunday, 13 March 2022
by the Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh in the Sanctuary at
Geneva Presbyterian Church in Laguna Woods, California*

Copyright © 2022
Steven M. Marsh
All rights reserved.