

“Retooling The Calling”

Acts 9:1-6

Psalm 30

Revelation 5:11-14

John 21:1-19

Our calling is an adoption to the calling of Israel. The conversion of Paul is an example of how Jesus meets each person who responds to God’s love for them. Yes, Jesus is the fulfillment of the Creator’s love. Jesus leads us to adoption into the family of Abraham. And Abraham’s family is God’s family. Jesus’ intrusion into Paul’s life redirected and retooled his call. Paul had strayed from the covenantal promise to Abraham. Jesus chose Paul. Jesus retooled Paul’s call to his lordship and away from the gods of empire. Jesus himself redeemed, transformed, and showed Paul the way that day on the Damascus Road.

It's all about Jesus. That reality is at the root of Jesus’ question to Simon Peter. John 21:15 reads, “...do you love me more than these?” Whatever forms of despair, discouragement, hate, prejudice, mean spiritedness, and doubt you bring to church this day, a new way of living is available to you. On this Third Sunday of Easter, the Psalmist declares in Psalm 30:2, “O LORD my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me.” Hope anticipates the fulfillment of God’s redemption and transformation of all creation.

Because of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, we can turn ourselves to God. This causes us to retool our calling. Yes, life is in flux, but not the redemptive power of the love of God and the transformative power of the resurrection. Past actions of deliverance lead to hope and faith that deliverance can happen again. Redemption occurs repeatedly... on and on and on.

The text from the Gospel of John is helpful in this regard exposing our tendency to resist

redemption and transformation due to a preoccupation with self:

When we adopt a posture of scarcity, we are selfish. Jesus appearing to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberius reminds us of the feeding stories of the thousands with a few fish and loaves of bread.

When we become immobilized by perseverance, we are selfish. Jesus helping the disciples catch fish reminds us of their boats being empty one moment and overfilled the next.

When we make God in our image, we are selfish. Jesus, unrecognized by the disciples when he called to them from the shore, reminds us how Mary mistook him as the gardener at the empty tomb.

When we complain about sacrifice and service, we are selfish. Jesus inviting the disciples to breakfast and feeding them reminds us how he did the same that fateful evening in the Upper Room.

When we are all talk and no action, we are selfish. Jesus asking Peter three times if he loved him reminds us of the three times Peter denied knowing Jesus.

Many would say that focusing on Jesus for self, societal, and cultural change is a waste of time. The vision given to John in Revelation 5 reminds us that a focus on Jesus for redemption and transformation is not a waste of time. Why? God is sovereign. Revelation 5:13 reads, "Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, 'To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!'" Jesus is worthy to be worshipped for what he accomplished in and through his earthly obedience, suffering, death, and resurrection for humanity. God is in control. The new heavens and new earth are being created now. And you are a participant in that mission of redemption and transformation. Yes, your words and deeds that demonstrate the Great

Commandment, the Great Commission, the teachings on the Sermon on the Mount, and Matthew 25 are redemptive and transformative.¹

Being preoccupied with “self,” we lose focus on Jesus and place it on ourselves. An emphasis on what we want when we want it is clearly a preoccupation with self. Mark Buchanan, pastor, professor, and author, relates the following encounter:

The Tuesday night prayer meeting at Brooklyn Tabernacle felt like skydiving into a tornado, exhausting and exhilarating all at once...Nothing prepared me for the event itself: 3,500 God-hungry people storming heaven for two hours.

Afterward...I went out to dinner with the Cymbalas. In the course of the meal, Jim turned to me and said, “Mark, do you know what the number one sin of the church in America is?” I wasn’t sure, and the question was rhetorical anyhow.

“The number one sin of the church in America,” he said, “is that its pastors and leaders are not on their knees crying out to God, “Bring us the...addicted...destitute...the people nobody else wants...and let us love them in your name...”

I had no response...I had never prayed, not once, for God to bring such people to my church. So, I went home and repented...I began to cry out for “those nobody wants.”²

There will be no more hunger or thirst. Jesus the Good Shepherd will shepherd all who will follow him through it all. Peter, several times in his relationship with Jesus was preoccupied with self.

Death was defeated at the 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.³ Can you this day capture a vision of inclusion of all people, which is

¹I am grateful for the thinking and writing of Walter Brueggemann, Cathy Caldwell Hoop, Marci Auld Glass, Katherine Grieb, Michael Battle, Marianne Meye Thompson, and Amy Plantinga Pauw 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),216-218, 219-220, 221-223, 224-226, 226-227, 228-230, and 230-232.

²Mark Buchanan, “Messy, Costly, Dirty Ministry,” *Leadershipjournal.net* (5-15-09).

³Gleaned from James C. Goodloe’s sermon “Why Seek the Living Among the Dead?” preached on January 15, 2006.

characterized by justice, kindness, and humility? The miracle of Easter, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, is the proof that God loves everyone my friends: betrayers, doubters, skeptics, and enemies.

To keep Jesus' commands to take care of his sheep is to love Jesus. There is no disclaimer on who are the sheep. Until the final judgment, all people are the sheep. And many sheep are going off the trail. Don't worry who the sheep are on the detour. Pray, pray, pray. Love, love, love. The people nobody wants and those trapped in the empty promises of power, prestige, and privilege will see and be invited into a better way to live. Marianne Meye Thompson, Professor of New Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary writes, "All that Jesus does is for the good of the world and the life of his sheep, whom he still loves, tends, and feeds."⁴ The reach of the good news of the gospel is everywhere and to everyone. Get at retooling the calling to love God, love others, and make disciples. Amen.

*This sermon was preached (for the In-Person, Online, and Village TV 6 congregations)
on Sunday, 01 May 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.

⁴Marianne Meye Thompson 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), 230.