

The Mission is for Amateurs

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

5th in a six-week series

October 8, 2017

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Exodus 4:1–17 (CEB)

Then Moses replied, “But what if they don’t believe me or pay attention to me? They might say to me, ‘The LORD didn’t appear to you!’ ”

²The LORD said to him, “What’s that in your hand?”

Moses replied, “A shepherd’s rod.”

³The LORD said, “Throw it down on the ground.” So Moses threw it on the ground, and it turned into a snake. Moses jumped back from it. ⁴Then the LORD said to Moses, “Reach out and grab the snake by the tail.” So Moses reached out and grabbed it, and it turned back into a rod in his hand. ⁵“Do this so that they will believe that the LORD, the God of their ancestors, Abraham’s God, Isaac’s God, and Jacob’s God has in fact appeared to you.”

⁶Again, the LORD said to Moses, “Put your hand inside your coat.” So Moses put his hand inside his coat. When he took his hand out, his hand had a skin disease flaky like snow. ⁷Then God said, “Put your hand back inside your coat.” So Moses put his hand back inside his coat. When he took it back out again, the skin of his hand had returned to normal. ⁸“If they won’t believe you or pay attention to the first sign, they may believe the second sign. ⁹If they won’t believe even these two signs or pay attention to you, then take some water from the Nile River and pour it out on dry ground. The water that you take from the Nile will turn into blood on the dry ground.”

¹⁰But Moses said to the LORD, “My Lord, I’ve never been able to speak well, not yesterday, not the day before, and certainly not now since you’ve been talking to your servant. I have a slow mouth and a thick tongue.”

¹¹Then the LORD said to him, “Who gives people the ability to speak? Who’s responsible for making them unable to speak or hard of hearing, sighted or blind? Isn’t it I, the LORD? ¹²Now go! I’ll help you speak, and I’ll teach you what you should say.”

¹³But Moses said, “Please, my Lord, just send someone else.”

¹⁴Then the LORD got angry at Moses and said, “What about your brother Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak very well. He’s on his way out to meet you now, and he’s looking forward to seeing you. ¹⁵Speak to him and tell him what he’s supposed to say. I’ll help both of you speak, and I’ll teach both of you what to do. ¹⁶Aaron will speak for you to the people. He’ll be a spokesperson for you, and you will be like God for him. ¹⁷Take this shepherd’s rod with you too so that you can do the signs.”

2 Corinthians 4:5–9 (CEB)

⁵We don’t preach about ourselves. Instead, we preach about Jesus Christ as Lord, and we describe ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake. ⁶God said that light should shine out of the darkness. He is the same one who shone in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

⁷But we have this treasure in clay pots so that the awesome power belongs to God and doesn’t come from us. ⁸We are experiencing all kinds of trouble, but we aren’t crushed. We are confused, but we aren’t depressed. ⁹We are harassed, but we aren’t abandoned. We are knocked down, but we aren’t knocked out.

Do what you love. God does.

We live in a professional age. Once upon a time, a professional was someone who had devoted years to mastering a large area of knowledge, demonstrated their competence, and were being paid to practice their profession. Further, professions were governed by some of sort professional body. Doctors, lawyers, nurses, veterinarians, dentists, and so on. There may have been some ambiguity around exactly what constituted a profession, but everyone got the idea.

Now, a “professional” is pretty much anyone who is getting paid to do their job, as in professional football players and professional boxers. Now it seems that most of us are “professionals,” good enough at what we do to get paid for it.

But God is an amateur. Yes, that's right, an amateur. This may be shocking if you think of an amateur as someone who lacks the competence or experience to get paid. But that shouldn't be how we think of an amateur. The word comes from the French, *amator*, meaning "lover."

An amateur is someone who does what they do because they love it. Pretty cool. God is an amateur because God's mission to put things right is made solely out of love: "God so *loved* the world that he gave his only Son . . ." (John 3:16). And this God of love, this God who simply *is* love (1 John 4:16), calls us to be part of his work . . . even cooler.

Vocation

Here's another word worth a closer look. "Vocation" is a direct descendent of the Latin, *vocatio*, meaning "summons" and the French, *vocare*, meaning "to call." We often use vocation to mean our occupation, what it is that employs us full-time. We even contrast it with avocation, meaning some sort of hobby or interest (too often something we enjoy doing a lot more than our vocation!). But we don't usually link "vocation" and "calling." Sometimes, we speak of someone having a calling when we see their passion for an occupation that seems so perfect for them. But usually, we reserve the idea of a "calling" for pastors and others who are "called" by God into ministry, like Samuel. But limiting our use of "vocation" is a mistake.

The key to grasping the Biblical understanding of vocation is to realize that, as Mark Roberts wrote in a series on vocation, "You don't get a vocation without someone doing the 'vocating.' You can have work without relationship. You can have a job all by yourself. But a vocation only comes when you're in relationship with someone who calls you." And God has called us all; we are all living in relationship with God. God calls a few Christians to full-time ministry, but God calls ("vocates!") most of us to honor God's claim on our lives by becoming faithful trustees of our gifts for ministry within the so-called secular realm.

"Honoring our raw materials"

But what does vocation, our calling, have to do with our willingness to work, to take risks for the kingdom of God, to be part of God's rescue mission? John Ortberg¹ calls it finding the line between "Thou shalt not be afraid" and "Thou shalt not be ridiculous." It is being able to discern the difference between God's call and our own rash impulses.

This begins with appreciating who we really are. We are all made in God's image. As God has work to do, so do we. Adam and Eve were given the Garden of Eden to work, before they made the tragic choice to rebel against God. And though we are all made in God's image, God has given us all differing personalities, desires, and talents that help to shape us for one sort of work or another. Ortberg writes, "To identify these [gifts] with clarity, to develop them with skill, and to use them joyfully and humbly to serve God and his creation is central to why you were created." When we are honest with ourselves and God about our gifts and limitations, we are much more likely to discover our own calling. Ortberg calls this "honoring our raw materials." When our work honors our raw materials, reality is our friend, the risks we take are much more likely to be wise.

For example, if I thought God was calling me to be an accountant, I'd be wrong. I simply lack the tools, such as a methodical attention to detail, that it takes to be a great accountant. Had I chosen that path for my life, I'd have ended up disappointed and burned out. It took me awhile to figure out that I am, at heart, a teacher and a learner. Looking back this seems obvious. When I was an Air Force pilot, I was an instructor pilot. I tutored others in finance during business school. Even when I went into the corporate world, the work I enjoyed the most was showing others that they could grow

¹From Ortberg's excellent book, *If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat*. All of Ortberg's books are excellent. He says his mission is to bring Dallas Willard to the masses. An admirable task!

and achieve more than they ever thought possible. But looking back is easy – how do we get better at looking forward?

If someone calls to us, the key is to listen. Our vocation, the life to which God has called us, is something we discover . . . it is not something we choose. And others can help us listen better. Ortberg notes that the Quakers use what they call a “clearness committee,” which comes together to help test and discern someone’s perceived calling. Such a committee probably would have helped me to realize at a younger age where my gifts really lie. Ortberg offers us the following questions that might help our discernment:

- “To what extent does your current work express your true giftedness and passion?”
- “Where has impulsivity gotten you into trouble? Where have you been likely to mistake vocation and foolishness?”
- “Reflect on your own life from childhood on. What activities and causes have brought you the most fulfillment?”
- “What limitation that’s part of your ‘raw material’ is most painful to you?”
- “How clear are you about your sense of calling? How would you describe it in a sentence or two?”
- “What is a low-cost/low-risk way you might try to explore your calling further?”

Many St. Andrew members are part of a small group, a connection group. These groups are a great way to listen to God and to test our own callings. The groups are a little like assembling our own “clearness committees.” The truth is that I am much more likely to hear God clearly on any matter if I have a group of trusted and mature disciples helping me to listen. Are you part of such a group? Who do you rely on to tell you the truth, to help guide you on your way?

A call that endures

Moses was reluctant, to say the least. When God called him, Moses sought a way out, any exit would do. So the man came up with excuse after excuse. But God had called him and that was that. Today’s passage from Exodus is part of this long dance between God and Moses.

In the end, Moses went and confronted Pharaoh. Indeed, as the story of Exodus unfolds, Moses becomes more and more the man we think him to be. Persevering, pleading with God, pressing on through rebellion and tragedy. Called by God. Sustained by God. That was the story we considered a few weeks ago: God turning ordinary people into “heroes of the faith.”

Still, I’d bet that Moses would readily identify with the following from Paul, written to the Christians in Corinth: “We are experiencing all kinds of trouble, but we aren’t crushed. We are confused, but we aren’t depressed. We are harassed, but we aren’t abandoned. We are knocked down, but we aren’t knocked out” (see full the passage above). In the same way, the call from God, from the one who loves us enough to pull us into his rescue project, sustains and helps us overcome adversity. Hallelujah!

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

The discussion questions for this series are drawn from the curriculum for our Connection Groups, which will be meeting throughout the series. The questions were written by Rev. Allison Jean.

1. How can you begin to incorporate your professional life into your Christian call? Have you ever felt that you are called into the career that you are currently in? Why or why not?
2. When have you felt that other people’s expectations took you in a different direction than where God was calling you? When have you found yourself being

defined by other's opinions? How did you discern this wasn't the mission God was giving to you? How did you respond to this situation?

3. How do we balance taking responsibility for what God is calling us to do while also trusting that God is working in and through situations around us? When do you struggle with this personally?
4. How do you respond to the idea that our calling or mission statement may be temporary or only for a season? How does this challenge you in your own life? Where are you feeling God calling you to change?
5. A large part of Paul's ministry was empowering others to claim their own gifts for the gospel and to join in God's ministry themselves. When has someone empowered you to claim a gift you weren't sure you had? What was this experience like? How did it change your ministry or relationship with God?

Daily Bible Readings

This week: *More on the call*

Monday, Genesis 1:27-31, 2:15-25 God calls Adam and Eve.

Tuesday, 1 Samuel 3 God calls Samuel when he is still a boy.

Wednesday, Hosea 1 God calls the prophet Hosea.

Thursday, Luke 1:26-38 God calls Mary.

Friday, Matthew 1:18-25 God calls Joseph.

Saturday, Acts 9:1-31 God calls the Pharisee Saul, later to be known as Paul.

Scott Engle's Bible Classes

Monday Evening Class

We are studying the book of Exodus.

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are studying the book of James

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

About the weekday classes:

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott must cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Scott's 10:50 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

Our current series: *The Old Testament: Sacred and Strange*