

Yes, you!

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

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by Rev. Dave Le Grand

We celebrated two big birthdays over the past two Sundays – first the birthday of the Christian Church on Pentecost, then we celebrated 95 years since the extraordinary work of 3 denominations deciding to become one United Church of Canada. The balloons are cleared, the bits of cake scraped off the floor. Now what? How do we live day-to-day as Christians?

Of course, we can ask: Is there any wisdom to glean from Biblical Story? You know I'm going to say, of course there is. This story we just heard, a portion of Jesus' pep talk to the disciples as he sends them off, no one alone, always in pairs. It is a tough world out there.

Imagine their lives, nomads wandering from town to town. They depended on the hospitality of villagers – no home; severing detachments that would weigh them down when Spirit calls. Utter trust in God's grace to carry them. For many among us, our problem is likely the opposite; we have many entanglements, mortgages or rent to pay, jobs or relationships that we might be very focused on.

How do we actively make space amidst the pressing demands of our lives so we can experience a call or sense of mission? Even if we do hear God's call, will we answer? *What is it you want me to do? You sure it's me you want?*

Calls in life, we've also used the term "shoulder taps"; do you have room in your life for one? What might one look like? Imagine that you are at the church's Annual Meeting. It is decided that the church needs a new diversity team. They need a chair for that team, someone with great skills. They are describing the mandate of this new committee and you hear your name mentioned... Would you consider leading this team, they ask? You have skills and experience. They are right. It is definitely work that is important to you, you think, but thinking more about it, the church has so much work to do. At first you're flattered. But, can you do it?

Those disciples upon first hearing Jesus' vision for the work to do at first hearing I imagine them excited, but then the questions emerge. They are natural ones. Can I do this? This is going to be challenging, is it worth it?

Really listen to Jesus, and the call does not at all sound easy. The Storyteller Matthew describes needy crowds of people needing hope, healing. *Travel light and don't accept money, Jesus says. If people don't welcome you or care to listen, brush the dust of at the edge of town and move on.* What, potentially hostile hosts? This always reminds me of my two weeks learning to sell vacuum cleaners with my trainer... twice we encountered hostility. One of those times the free thank you gift my supervisor gave them was used as a projectile thrown at us as we fled the house.

The call to be Christian is not at all easy. This all brings to mind for me the words of Bruce Cockburn:

*But nothing worth having comes without some kind of fight.
Got to kick at the darkness 'til it bleeds daylight.¹*

The good news is that they, and we, are told not to do this alone. We are part of community first, we accompany one another. A phrase in today's instructions of Jesus intrigues me:

Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town
of the Samaritans, but go rather
to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Jesus is not here advising his friends *not* to reach boldly outside their Jewish circles to those in need. "Lost sheep...of Israel" – for me those are the faithful, the people have just lost their way and need care. There is something very close to home for me, in this. So many children and grandchildren of dedicated United Church people grew up hearing the stories of faith.

But, somehow, the Story doesn't always take hold in them. So many wonderful people in our world do not get to hear, daily or weekly, that they are known and so loved by God. Not the fickle brand of love that the world offers. but God's love is unconditional type that loves you with all your blemishes. In this busy world I think that people need to be reminded that they have purpose, and that calls from God are not just for Reverend or Pastor so-and-so. Like Torrin, exploring his call to an adventure ahead that is still taking shape for him. For you, and I, and all of us, working out a sense of call can take a lifetime.

Where are the good people weighed down by burdens in life; entangled in the complexity, needing to simplify? How do we encourage one another in this holy loving work?

Those *crowds* comprised of the *harassed and helpless*. We know that that our work as Christians begins with our collective work to meet fundamental needs: providing food and shelter to those who have little. But then, as Maslow suggests, when those are met, we help each other, the needy people around us, to address the spiritual needs; helping one another to contribute meaningfully. Feeling like we belong within a community. We are called not to go alone, but go as community, to go with God to model Holy and Unconditional Love to a world full of good people in our families, among our friends, and even to strangers who just need to be reminded that God loves them, blemishes and all.

¹ Lovers in a Dangerous Time. Bruce Cockburn. lyrics © Carlin America Inc