

First Congregational Church Cannon Falls
Rev. Grace Anderson
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Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18
Philippians 3;17-4:1
Luke 13:31-35

“Fulfilling Our Call”

Do you know anyone who said that their life would turn out in a specific way and it did? You may be that person or you know someone. Initially, someone may have said “I want to be a pilot” or “I want to be an architect or accountant or teacher.” They may have been met with laughter and snide comments until that day when they did become whatever it was, they wanted to become. That life vision could have included where they wanted to live, how they wanted to live and with whom they wanted to live and that happened, too.

Well, I am not one of those people – who set out for one specific life. Initially, I was going to be a special education teacher. Then, while in college I discovered television production. As I graduated, I began working at a TV station and then into corporate video production. I had a lot of fun with it but something was missing. It was difficult for me to figure what was missing because, at the time, I did not think that a career or calling into ministry was even something to consider. I grew up in a time in the Episcopal Church when women were not ordained.

Additionally, as I began my career in the 1980’s, so much emphasis in my friend group and hometown was on making money, climbing the corporate ladder and spreading my wings as a female in a world that was continuing to open up with possibilities. Yet, something was still missing. Starting in about the 8th grade, I kept having this gnawing pull or call toward a more spiritual life and that was what I felt was missing as a young adult.

In our Lenten reflection time, we may all be contemplating where we are being called. Our calling is not a single, one-time event. Our calling for the spiritual life or life infused with the Spirit continues throughout our lifetimes as we change and as the world around us changes. And now, we may be wondering how we can fill up our spiritual gas tank (no pun intended) in a time of so much uncertainty. A good way to contemplate where God is calling you may start as we are together in community, our families and our close friends. Private prayer time or when volunteering or attending a bible study may be other times that also feed us in

our quest. These are places where, when we step back, we see God at work. God, who loves us and guides us through the ups and downs of life. God, who brings people into our lives at just the moment we need that person. God, who may lead us to a book, a piece or scripture when we need it most.

And speaking of the ups and downs of life, Jesus seemed to be having one of *those* days where the pressures of life were upon him – in a big way. We encounter him busy in his ministry when some Pharisees find him. They warn him to “get away from here, for Herod wants to kill [him].” His response is like he is responding to a pesky boss. In modern vernacular, I can hear him saying back “yeah, yeah, like I don’t know it. He threatens everyone when they come into Jerusalem, afraid they will take his spotlight.” He may go on to say, “Tell him I’m busy. I’ve got demons to cast out, cures to administer. I’ll get to him and his threat on the third day when my work is finished.”

Jesus knows this work doesn’t begin to cover all that he is needed for. He says “how often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing.” He tends to the poor and those not seen by those in power. By ministering to them, he further highlights the stubbornness of these leaders who were not willing to be gathered under God’s wings for care and protection or to help those in need in the first place.

Herod the fox, as Jesus called him, was certainly not welcoming and by all accounts, did not care for Jesus – especially his message that upsets the bureaucratic apple cart. This Herod is the son of Herod the Great and he is the same Herod that ordered the beheading of John the Baptist. This Herod led in a city that did not take too kindly to prophets going back seven centuries. So many prophets such as Jeremiah, Uriah and Zechariah and Isaiah “piqued the ire of the Jerusalem elite,” according to commentator Daniel Deffenbaugh. He goes on to write that these prophets raised their voices to remind the “kings and their bureaucrats of their covenantal duty but to no avail.”

The prophets saw that nothing came about no matter how long and how loud they cried out. They knew as Jesus who followed them that God would have to do “a new thing” as Isaiah prophesied. As Jesus was working tirelessly to bring about that “new thing” on God’s behalf, he is clear in his call, in his mission.

He must keep healing, curing and preaching of a new way of being here on earth as it is in heaven. He also knew his earthly ministry would end and on the third day, his work would be finished - an allusion to what is coming at Easter. The day in which he would be raised from the dead. It is on this day that many will indeed experience what Jesus had been talking about since the beginning of his ministry in the three years before his death. That is when more will say to him, as he predicts, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord." It is a path, ordained by God and Jesus' ultimate calling.

In the meantime, Jesus is caught up in the political maneuverings of his day. The Pharisees were friendly with Jesus and sometimes not. They challenged him while at other times, they ate a meal with him. Kind of like family. So, this warning they give to Jesus about Herod wanting Jesus dead – was it to protect him in order to keep him away from Jerusalem? Or was it Herod making the demands so that Jesus would stay out of his jurisdiction? This way Herod could kick the proverbial football down the field so that Jesus become Pilate's issue?

We know how this story end. He continues to travel to Jerusalem regardless of the threats from Herod. He continues to Jerusalem all the while challenging "Jerusalem to recognize the divine origin of his mission and message" according to commentator Leslie Hoppe. They are a stubborn lot and many of them loyal to Rome and not to this "new thing" that Jesus is preaching about. They refuse to accept that the last shall be first and the first shall be last. Where would that leave them, they may have been asking. They refuse to acknowledge him that he is King of the Jews because they can only blindly see one form of leadership – dominance, threats and exclusion. All of which Jesus is *not* proclaiming. These are not attributes of God's vision for our world.

God continues to call us to this vision that Jesus is proclaiming. God continues to call us home. God continues to call to us at each phase of our lives. Our calling may not be as dramatic but we are called. We are called in one way or another. We may be called to tend to those who are hurting. We may be called to help our children learn. We may be called to keep finances in order. We may be called to explore the world of science or art. We may be called to nurture and to love our friends and family. No matter how we are called, we are fulfilling God's vision for us here on earth as we share our love, our wisdom, our humor and our faith.

And as we move into our discernment time here at First Congregational, we are called to usher in a new era for this congregation. We may not see what this looks like at this particular moment. That is what discernment periods are for – for us to discern where God is calling us. Throughout the many centuries of our Christian life, so many before us have answered a call that brought us to this moment. Through schisms, divisions, reformations and reforms, our ancestors in faith have been called. Through wars, pandemics, social unrest and great societal changes, our ancestors in faith have been called. Through marriages, births, deaths and illness, our ancestors in faith have been called.

We are on our own threshold of God doing “a new thing.” What and how that will look is for us to discover. In our communal gatherings, in our prayers, in our worship and in our casual conversations, may we listen for that still small voice of God calling to us. How our children, grandchildren and community remember us and the legacy that we leave will come out of this shared work upon which we are embarking! May we take our time and not be in a rush because who knows, the timing may be God’s time and not ours. Amen.