9/22-23/18 Rev Amy Haines

Ex 3:1-12, Acts 6:1-7 Finding Your Place to Serve Make a Difference Series

..Antonio’s voice was high and squeaky, so he did not make the tryouts for the Cremona Boys’ Choir. When Antonio took violin lessons, the neighbors persuaded his parents to make him stop. Yet Antonio still wanted to make music.

His friends gave him a hard time because his only talent was whittling. Yet when Antonio was older he served as an apprentice to a violinmaker. His knack for whittling grew into a skill of carving and his hobby became his craft. He worked patiently and faithfully. By the time he died, he left over 1,500 violins, each one bearing a label that read, “Antonio Stradivarius.” They are the most sought-after violins in the world and sell for more than $100,000 each.

-- Brian Bill “Using What God Has Given You” 5-02 sermoncentral.com

The history of classical music would not be the same without Antonio’s violins. Antonio couldn’t sing or play yet he never let go of his passion for music. Instead he kept searching and experimenting until he found a way to finally make beautiful music in this world.

Have you ever had a passion for something, yet struggled how to live out that passion? Have you ever wanted to serve, yet was unsure in what way you could contribute? Have you ever had a vision, yet was afraid to step out to fulfill that vision? If you answered yes to any of those,

know that you are not alone.

Today we hear the call of Moses. Yet also consider the call of Samuel and Abraham, of Mary and Paul, of Thomas and Jonah, of Stephen and Barnabas. Each one heard God’s call in their lives. Each one experienced the mercy and grace of God. Some, however, struggled to believe that they had the right skills or attitude to do what God was calling them to do. Some even argued with God on whether or not they were the right person for the ministry. Yet each one, however reluctantly, finally responded to God’s grace by stepping out in faith and following where God led them.

How have we experienced the grace of God in our lives? When have we heard God’s call to be followers of Jesus? And how are we responding to such a call, living by love and grace, living in mission and service, all for the glory of God?

Like the apostle Paul in his letters to the churches at Ephesus and Rome, today we are moving in the midst of our September sermon series from hearing God’s call to responding to God’s call. We are called to follow Jesus. We are called to go and make disciples. We are called to respond to God’s grace with our love. We are called to do our part to build up the body of Christ. We are called…so how do we respond? How do we Make a Difference?

In pondering how we respond through service, Rev. James Harnish, in his book *Make a Difference*, invites us to consider the old yet powerful phrase that was painted on railroad crossing signs when he was growing up. The phrase said, “Stop. Look. Listen.”

Harnish says,

“Those three imperatives are good advice as we seek to find the place where we are to serve.

They also describe the way Moses experienced God’s call.”

“The OT storyteller said Moses was tending Jethro’s flock when he stopped at Mount Horeb.

That’s where Moses looked at the burning bush. He listened and heard God say, “I’ve clearly seen my people oppressed in Egypt. I’ve heard their cry of injustice because of their slave masters. I know their pain. I’ve come down to rescue them.” Then Moses heard the Lord say, “So get going. I’m sending you…”

“So Like Moses, we can discern where God is calling us to serve when we intentionally stop, look and listen.”

--James Harnish “Make a Difference” p.71

**Stop**

Moses was minding his own business, caring for the sheep in the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, when he came to the edge of Horeb, the mountain of God. And there, Moses saw a bush that was blazing with fire, yet not burning up. Moses stopped what he was doing to go and check out the amazing sight of a bush burning yet not burnt up. It was only when he stopped that Moses was then able to hear the voice of God.

Like Moses, most of us need to stop what we are doing in order to hear God’s voice.

When [Harnish] surveyed clergy and church members on the reasons people struggle to find their place to serve, the most common answer was over-commitment.

--Harnish p.71

We are busy people—as students, as parents, as workers, even as retirees. Between my church meetings and studies and my children’s activities and Scouts, there are times Ken and I feel like we are going in three directions at once.

Yet, when we are busy, when we are running in ten different directions at once, when we feel like there aren’t enough hours in the day to get everything done, we don’t have time to stop and wonder why a bush is burning yet not burnt up. We don’t have time to see the needs of those around us. We don’t have time to see the ministry happening all around us. When we are consumed by busyness, we don’t have time to stop and listen for the call of God.

Then we burnout. Burnout is real. Among coaches and parents. Among students and even church leaders. Those who feel most responsible are often not leading in just one area of life or church, but in several. They don’t want to see anything or anyone fail, which is commendable.

But at some point, we all need to stop. We all need to take a deep breath. And just be.

Then, and only then, can we listen to God and see the needs of those around us.

Yes, God calls us all to serve. Yet there are also times God calls us to rest. Sometimes God calls us to rest because when we are running every which way we are so exhausted we will never have the energy to serve effectively. Sometimes God calls us to rest not because our time of service is finished, but in order to replenish our spirit, our passion and our energy.

How is God calling you to stop, to pause, to just be today?

**Look**

Moses saw a bush burning yet not burnt, so stopped for a closer look. For years Moses had been running from his past, hiding out far from Pharaoh. He didn’t want to look back. Yet when Moses came face to face with God through the burning bush, Moses also came face to face once again with the suffering of God’s people.

When we stop long enough to look deeply at the world around us, we may be honestly frightened by what we see. The needs around us are great, even here in Springboro. Who are hurting? Who are in need? How can we possibly make a difference? Where can we best serve?

Who sitting around us even in worship today is putting on a good game face, yet hurting deep inside?

Harsh reminds us:

“The good news is that you don’t have to see a burning bush or go on a mission trip to some distant part of the world for your eyes to be opened to the places where you can make a life-giving difference in the lives of others. The greatest value of that kind of experience is often the way it equips us to see more clearly the needs that are in our own backyard.”

--Harnish p.73

When we stop to be in God’s presence, often God will gift us with Spirit-awakened eyes. Then God calls us to look around. What needs are there in our own backyard? Since we cannot tackle all of the needs at once, what needs can we meet with our church’s strengths, talents, and availability?

Currently we meet the need in this community of a Christian preschool. We meet the need of space for Al Anon and scouts. We assist with meeting the need of food and clothing through The Pantry and SCAC and the need of housing through IHN. Yet what more is God calling us to do, as a community of faith and individuals in that community?

**Listen**

Moses stopped, then looked at the bush burning yet not burnt. Only then was he in a position to listen to the call of God.

God reminded Moses he was the God of Moses’ ancestors. And God reassured Moses that he heard the cries of oppression and suffering. God declared to Moses that he would deliver God’s people out of slavery in Egypt into a new land. Then God called Moses to be that deliverer.

When do we hear God calling us to serve? And how often, like Moses, does that call come at an unexpected time or in an unexpected way?

..Frances Perkins became the first woman to serve on the US Cabinet when FDR appointed her to be the secretary of labor in 1933. But her journey began as a teenager when she was confirmed in the Episcopal Church. She continued to practice the spiritual disciplines she learned in those years throughout her life. Even during the stressful twelve years she served in the government, she was regular in worship and reserved time for a monthly retreat for prayer… She learned to stop, look and listen for God’s call.

[Prior to serving in FDR’s Cabinet,] she was engaged in the needs of the poor in New York City.

Then the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory went up in flames in 1911, killing 146 garment workers.

There were no fire codes in the city at the time. There were no extinguishers, exits were locked,

and fire ladders were unable to reach the upper stories of the building. … The fire became a “burning bush” moment in Perkin’s life. David Brooks wrote, “Her own desires and her own ego became less central and the cause itself became more central to the structure of her life.”

Hers was a “summoned life…Perkins didn’t so much choose her life. She responded to the call of a felt necessity.”

--Harnish p.76-77

When we consider how God is calling us to serve, consider how God has created and gifted you

for such a purpose at such a time as this.

Pastor Rick Warren likes to use the acronym SHAPE to assist his congregation in recognizing

their entire lives are geared for service, and I invite you to prayerfully ponder how this is also true for your own life.

Think of the word SHAPE. S-H-A-P-E

Shape begins with

S- Spiritual Gifts

Spiritual gifts are ‘special abilities given to every Christian, by the grace of God, through the Holy Spirit, to be used to serve and strengthen one another, and to glorify God.’”

--“Leadership from the Heart” p. 35

There are lists of spiritual gifts in several places in the New Testament, and according to Pastor Rick Warren, these spiritual gifts fall into five categories:

Gifts that communicate such as evangelism or prophecy

Gifts that educate such as teaching or encouraging

Gifts that demonstrate such as service or hospitality or preaching or giving

Gifts that celebrate such as healing or tongues or music

Gifts that support such as leadership or administration

To discern your God-given gift, there are many resources that offer free spiritual gifts assessments, including our own denominational website, umc.org. Or talk with Pastor Doug to assist you in this discernment of gifts.

In Confirmation our session on spiritual gifts reminded us to explore and experiment in order to find our strengths that will glorify God.

While important, what you offer for service is not limited to just your spiritual gifts. God also invites you to offer the rest of your life in service.

Next in SHAPE is

H- Heart

Complete the phrase, “I love to…” This will get to your passions, what you like to do, what tugs at your heart strings, or what motivates you. Your passions may be within or outside these church walls. While one person may love to teach youth in Sunday School, another may love to lead a group of women at the local shelter.

Next is

A- Abilities

What are you good at doing? What skills have you learned, what talents have you honed? This one may be where you connect your day job with ministry, where what you have been trained to do can also be an asset to the way you serve.

Next is

P- Personality

Extrovert or introvert- how are you energized? Routine or variety- what kind of tasks do you prefer? Self-controlled or self-expressive—how open are you with others? Cooperative or competitive—how do you relate to others? While we learn to adapt to our personalities, in general, we are not going to change how we are wired. Someone may love to work in a team, and someone else may like an individual project. So consider that as you consider your fit in ministry.

Finally SHAPE ends with

E- Experiences

Do not discount your faith journey story, or your education, or your work, or your ministry,

or even your painful moments of life. They are all a part of who you are, and maybe you will bear fruit by sharing in the pain and loss of others, having experienced it yourself. The best addiction counselors are often those who have been through addiction. Only a widow can understand the struggle of another widow.

 --taken from Rick Warren “Doing Life Together: Developing Your Shape to Serve Others”

SHAPE is just one way to consider how God has made you you and what you have to offer back to God.

Can you imagine how strange the body of Christ would look or act if we were all gifted with the same gifts?

In the church we need

those who can preach and those who can teach,

those who encourage and those who sing,

those who can administer and those who can cast visions,

those who shovel snow and those who fix leaks,

those who cook and those who visit,

those who work with technology and those who work with flowers.

Your gift may be to work with children or your gift may be to work with returning citizens. Your gift may lead you to be very visible to others or your gift may lead you to work behind the scenes.

Can you imagine how much the body of Christ struggles when not everyone serves sharing their gifts and skills and experiences?

So where is God calling you to serve? How has God shaped you to serve in Christ’s name?

**Get Going**

Knowing our SHAPE only helps us if we are willing to share of ourselves, willing to take the next step of faith.

Rev. Harnish reminds us:

“The purpose of the stop-look-listen railroad sign is not to keep us sitting along the railroad track but to let us know when it is time to go. After an intense debate with God in which Moses offered every excuse he could think of, Scripture finally says, “Moses went.” (4.18)

Moses took action. He obeyed God’s call and went to Pharaoh. The rest of [Exodus] is God’s liberation of the covenant people, but none of it would have happened if Moses had not taken action.

--Harnish p.78

Consider our Acts passage from the early church today. As God kept adding to the number of followers of Christ in Jerusalem, many of them began to share their possessions one with another, and the early church leaders continued the Jewish call to care for widows with a daily distribution of food. Yet the Hellenist Jews accused the Hebrew Jews of neglecting their widows in this daily distribution. Instead of ignoring such a complaint of favoritism, the apostles stopped, looked, and listened to see if the concern was true.

Finding it to be so, they then took action and appointed 7 men from among the Hellenist Jews to care for their widows while they returned to praying and proclaiming the word. You could say this was the first ministry team formed in the early church, yet it reminds us that the church’s entire ministry is founded on servant ministry.

How do we care for one another? How do we listen to God’s call, then respond in service with and for one another?

Our Christian faith is not defined by where we sit in worship but by how we respond in service to God’s grace. As long as you are still breathing, you are still called to serve. There is no retirement from being a member of the body of Christ.

You may be willing to commit to a longer term leadership position or weekly commitment in music or education.

You may say you are done with committee work. Or you don’t have time for a long-term commitment. If so, then find something you can do on an occasional basis. Greet. Read scripture. Drive. Fix food. Be a second adult present with youth.

You may say you are too old to serve. Then be a prayer warrior. Call to check in on neighbors and friends. Adopt a youth as another grandchild and encourage their passions.

Each one of us is still called to find a place to serve, to use our unique gifts and life experiences

to make a Kingdom-shaped difference in our world today.

Next Sunday I invite you to return for worship then stay for lunch and the ministry fair. As we fellowship around the table, may we listen for one another’s stories of God’s presence in our lives. As we celebrate ministries, may we give thanks for the ways our members in this body of Christ have served in the name of Jesus. As we ponder God’s call, may we be open to the possibilities of future service in Jesus’ name.

Frederick Buechner once declared that “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”

--Dave Barnhart “Ministry of all Christians” 6-26-12 ministrymatters.com

May God continue to call us and guide us to find our places to serve.

May it be so. Let us pray.