

AN INVITATION TO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP:
"FOLLOW YOUR CALLING"

Luke 2:41-52

Dr. J. Howard Olds

April 15, 2007

Back in the 1980's, popular author Stephen Covey said the key to managing life is distinguishing between the urgent and the important. Urgent matters clamor for our attention. Important matters shape our lives. Before cell phones and Blackberries became a part of our anatomy, Covey warned that a phone call most likely will feel urgent, but it may not be very important. On the other hand, a call from God is both urgent and important.

Two critically important questions every person must ask and keep on asking for a lifetime are "Who am I?" and "Why am I here?" Is that not what Jesus was asking when he got left behind at the temple in the story only Luke bothers to tell. Come, let's take a look.

WHO AM I?

Everybody needs to answer that question and keep on answering it for a lifetime.

Scientifically speaking, I am a chance meeting between millions of male sperm and millions of female eggs. If they happen to connect at the right time, in the right way, they form an embryo, which becomes a fetus, which evolves into a Bobbie or Susie, Howard or Sandy. It all makes you feel kind of accidental, does it not? No wonder we have trouble treating the unborn with the same dignity and reverence we attach to human life. In the beginning we are not even a good lottery bet.

We are not on this earth very long until we come to realize that we have relationships that come with expectations. We have mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, aunts and uncles, and lots of others who feel compelled to tell us what to do.

Parents want us to sleep all night. They expect us to gain control of our bowel movements. They may even expect us to clean up our messes, and pick up our toys, and behave in the prescribed ways, at least when company comes.

Siblings seem particularly concerned about proper places in the pecking order of things. The old joke constantly used by the Smothers' Brothers stating that "Father loved you best," is not very funny in the souls of many siblings who have struggled for respect and recognition in family systems.

And the list goes on. Employers expect us to come to work on time and get the job done. Communities expect us to obey the speed limit and refrain from trespassing. Churches want us to support them with prayers, presence, gifts and service. We become what we do.

There is a strong saying in the South which goes, “If Mamma ain’t happy, ain’t nobody happy.” To say that Mary, the mother of Jesus, is not happy in this story is to state it mildly. What she wants to know is why Jesus would treat them like He did. And she says it with all the anxiety of any parent who found a child missing.

Above the clatter of relationships and even deeper than our DNA, our true identity comes from another voice. Spiritually speaking, we are the beloved children of God. When Jesus was baptized the Heavens opened, the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove, and a Voice from heaven said, “*This is my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.*” O child of God, remember who you are.

The Psalmist says, “*God, you created my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.*” Henry Nouwen says, “We are the beloved. We are intimately loved long before our parents, teachers, spouses, children and friends loved or wounded us. That is the truth of our lives.” Some of us here today need to answer our identity question once and for all. **YOU ARE A LOVED CHILD OF GOD! DO NOT EVER FORGET IT!**

WHY AM I HERE?

Even as a twelve-year-old kid, Jesus had it figured out: “*Didn’t you know I had to be about my Father’s business?*” Was this statement an act of adolescent rebellion? Or is it a profound truth? Note how Jesus finds his purpose in life by being about his Father’s business. Is faith in God a peripheral matter to you, or does it shape your life in some profound way? Is God at the center of your being or simply sailing around the circumference of your identity? In life, at work, at home, at church, make the main thing God.

The Westminster Catechism says our chief purpose in life is to “Glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” How do we glorify God? We lift His name on high. We sing a song, say a prayer, raise a hand, bend a knee, give a gift. We go to church, share a witness, turn a good deed.

I listened to our youngest choir give their concert last Wednesday night. Whatever they may have lacked in precision, they made up in passion. As they sang again and again, “Our God is an awesome God,” I found my mind affirming that truth in my soul. God is an awesome God. He flung the stars into space and blesses our lives with amazing grace. He is big enough to rule this mighty universe, but small enough to live within each of our hearts. That is awesome.

We do it all for Jesus. Clean the house, preach the sermons, go to school, make the sales, teach the children, tend to patients, read the books, earn the money, serve the community, not for our sake, but for Christ’s sake. Do not let your itch for things or your ear for applause derail you from giving God the honor and glory. And best of all we do it with joy, gratitude and gratefulness.

WHY AM I HERE? I am here to serve others.

When James and John were jockeying for promotion in the Kingdom of God, Jesus said this, *“The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve.”* There are some things that servers do:

Servers think first about others instead of themselves. Serving begins in the mind. The mantra of a server is “What may I do for you?” not “What can you do for me?” Servers seek to give, not to get. Servers seek the common good over personal gain. Servers know they are not owners. They are managers.

Servers do not compete, they complete. Serving is not about winning or losing. It is about sharing. There is no place for petty jealousy among servants. Servants do not operate by titles, positions, power, and prestige. They simply get the job done without concern for credit. Life is not about getting there first, it is about being faithful to the end.

Servers see ministry as an opportunity, not an obligation. Albert Schweitzer once said, “The only really happy people in the world are those who have learned to serve.”

WHY AM I HERE? I am here to make a difference.

One of the greatest stories in the Bible is the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000. It is late in the day. The hills are crowded with people. The disciples have not made plans for supper. There are no fast food places on the Sea of Galilee. So, Jesus passes a miracle and feeds the crowd with plenty of leftovers for the disciples to take home. As John tells the story, the whole thing was made possible by a little boy who happened to have a small lunch consisting of five barley loaves and two fish.

I suppose all of us dream of some claim to fame, of some point in history where we make a monumental difference in the course of humanity. But that is not how it happens. We make a difference by doing what we can, and giving what we have through ordinary ways. Very few in the crowd even knew that the food came from the little boy’s lunch. Yet this child, this boy - whose name we do not even know, whose identity goes unmarked - did what he could and gave what he had. Are you willing to do that?

“Didn’t you know I had to be about my Father’s business?” My true identity comes from my Heavenly Father. I am a beloved child of God. My main purpose is to be about God’s business and the main thing is to make the main thing the main thing. Thanks be to God.

Amen.