



Sunday, March 8, 2020

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Commissioned for an Uncertain Future

With the Patio Sale this week, I am reminded of having served a church outside Milwaukee that annually held a "Rummage Sale" however, one year the date of the sale moved because of the Easter Calendar. The same Church also had a growing Youth Group, we became known because I notched 6" X 6" beams, and each year I led the youth to plant this 12' tall Wooden Cross in front of the Church sign, which on Maundy Thursday evening the youth draped with black fabric, and Easter morning we exchanged the black for dazzling white with helium balloons. This year, the folk putting out the sign for the rummage sale did not tie the sign to the entry columns of the Church, but instead to the base of the Cross by the roadside. Not 10 minutes later, my phone was ringing. The person on the other end was quite irate. I asked what the problem was, as we had had a rummage sale for many years. The Caller said, "At the base of the Cross of Jesus, you have a sign reading 'Trash and Treasure'". I tried to respond Biblically, about how "One man's Trash is another's Treasure" and "The stone which the Builders rejected has become the head and cornerstone," but at the end of the Call I moved the sign.

About 4000 years ago, so about as many Centuries Before Christ as we are since his resurrection, Abram's father Terah died and Abram received a Commission from God. Often in English, we hear of Commissioning, regarding paying an artist to create an original artwork, contracting a musician to compose a piece, or sending out a Request for a Proposal of a scientific study, in other words "To pay a specialist to commit their imagination and energies to create something useful". OR, our minds leap to Commissioned Officers, who by virtue of an education, enter the military above the basic entry level ranks as 2nd Lieutenant or Captain. Commissioning recognizes authority in leadership, especially in times of Conflict. This Divine Commissioning was not for money, or military service, or authority in conflict.

Abram's Commissioning was to Go, leave your home, your country, your people, your father's household, go to where God shows you. Believing he had heard the very Voice of God, at an advanced age, Abram left as the Lord had told him, to go to a place he had never seen or known, which God would reveal, a place in the High desert surrounded by Mountains.

In so doing Abram acted whole-heartedly and without absolute certainty! He defied the inner voices of human nature and the external cultural pressures of conformity: to cling to the familiar. Abram journeyed from what he knew, to what he could not have known, from what he had to what he did not, from the comfortable to the strange and unpredictable. Most everything in our culture, education, family, employment demands the opposite: from the unknown to the known, from our insecurity to what we think we want and need, removing everything strange or different in order to guarantee safety. We demand half-heartedly as if certain.

Most who come to Green Valley, initially come for a Weekend or maybe a Week, then rent for a Month, then for 3 Months, before committing to moving here year round, and still make trips back after moving here. As Pastor, I identify personally with Abram! At an advanced age, I was told by God and Eloise Frederickson to go from Syracuse New York to a place God would show us, where we had never lived before, in the High Desert surrounded by mountains.

One of the greatest difficulties of CHANGE, is that those around you have a difficult time allowing you to change. They like having you the way in which you have been, how they know you, and they have difficulty imagining that you might enjoy anything different, as if to go where you are led is an indictment of who they are and have been for you.

Chapters 11 - 12 of Genesis are sometimes referred to as being a Fulcrum in the history of God. When read from beginning to end, Genesis is clearly one continuous story, yet the story falls into two distinct parts. Throughout the first 11 Chapters, sometimes called the Primordial, God Begins with Creation of everything from Chaos, darkness and unknown, to Balanced, Ordered, Knowable, Planned to be. But whenever God tries to be God, in relationship to People, the people stick with old behaviors & fail God. After the Garden of Eden, God began with the next generation but Brothers are jealous, Cain kills Abel; God begins again but Humanity corrupts and perverts the whole of creation, so God unleashes the balance of Chaos, and with the Rainbow God begins again with Noah; HOWEVER, rather than a people who journey through life with God, People decide to settle in a place to build a name for themselves, rather than being migratory they determine to build their houses out of brick & mortar for permanence, to build towers into heaven that all the world would see how great they were because they could touch Heaven when they desire rather than seeking God. Seeking only their own desires without God, seeking to settle and be comfortable, concerned that all the world know who they are; they were defeated, confused, scattered, they could no longer even hear or understand one another. GOD BEGINS ANEW, but instead of the whole of the human race, God picks one family, Abram. Where humanity had chosen to Settle in a place that was known, to build houses where they could raise their children, to build permanent stairways to heaven, to make a great name for themselves (ALL OF WHICH WITHOUT GOD), God Commissions Abram to Go, Go where God tells you, to a Place God will show you, God will give you a land, God will give you a great name, God will form out of you many nations.

As believers who were baptized with Christ 2000 years ago, do we not know? Have we only believed in the certain, secure and safe? In the 1960s, 70s and 80s we repeated the same mistake as Nicodemus, our trying to know by outward physical experience who was BORN AGAIN and who was not. The great pain of having faith is trusting in an uncertain future, believing in the Spiritual taking place in the Flesh, and our lives being used spiritually by God.

As Presbyterians we do not believe in PREDETERMINATION, our future is unknown! PREDETERMINATION would be boring for God and us, as we simply went through the motions of life. PREDESTINATION instead, means that left to our own devices, like the people before the Flood, like the people building Towers to their own power, we are heading to Hell. BUT GOD gives each and every one of us GRACE. God provided Grace to Abram and Sarai in Blessings throughout life, and in Isaac laughter. God provided Grace to us in Jesus Christ. God continues to love us and provide Grace to us. SOME of us are as impermeable as MARBLE, and God's Grace washes off us. Some of us are able to listen and see and Go where God leads. NONE of us can judge others and know what is in their heart, that is up to God. But Going where God leads... Listening for God and Listening to one another in their hurts, seeing the world, are pretty good indications of God's Grace getting through to us. I do believe God has a plan for us a Plan for all Creation. But I also believe God trusts our freedom of will, to decide for ourselves how we are going to respond to God's Creation, to Choose to LOVE God.

Being Commissioned with a Divine Commission is not permission to be a Loose Canon doing whatever we want. Being Commissioned with a Divine Commission is recognition of great responsibility, for some

to see and witness, for some to listen and care, for some to minister and teach. But what I love about Divine Commissioning is that we go with God, we Go from what we have known, from our places of safety and security to care for and bless others we have not yet been shown, confident because we have been assured of it, that this Church stand with you and behind you, we pray for you and want the best for you, and we long for those Commissioned to be transformed by the experience where God is Calling.