

Who do you want to be when you grow up? I can remember being about 3, held in my father's arms at the doors of the Sanctuary after worship, when someone asked if I wanted to be a Pastor like my father, and I responded "No I want to be a fireman." That was the last time I can recall wanting to be anything other than a pastor, and I did serve for over 20 years as the Chaplain of the Fire Department. What no one anticipated/ what I had no idea about, was: What would be required in being a Minister these 40 years. Serving GOD has Called me to serve in Churches across the Midwest, in the far Northeast and now SW, to the Soviet Union, to inspecting the Maquiladoras industries in Mexico, to South Sudan and to Guatemala. I was a Chaplain in a Harlem Hospital when AIDS was rampant but had no name. I was a neighboring pastor in Milwaukee when Jeffrey Dahmer was killing people. There were Mission Trips when the Mississippi flooded. Prayer vigils on 9/11. Hospital Ethics Committees. City Ethics Boards. Closures of Churches. Reorganization of Presbyteries. Preparing couples to be married then, Grieving with Brides when their fiancés died, Hugging parents when their children were buried. Multi-million-dollar Capital projects. Standing with persons before the Court who were guilty and shielding them from the Media. I recall a Christmas Eve, when before entering the Sanctuary, a man spit in my face. There have been times when you felt the sting of people's insults and betrayals, when scorned, taking a punch and slapped in the face because of people's hate of how religion has been abused. There have been countless nights asking GOD WHY? and yet never questioning if there is a GOD, or where is GOD. When you love the Church, when you love GOD, you experience with every person WHO THEY ARE and what GOD FEELS.

Realize how COUNTER-CULTURAL were these words from Isaiah! Isaiah was the High Priest at Solomon's Temple at Jerusalem. Second only to the King in Power. Jewish Temple Worship was not about the Reading of the Bible or Preaching of the Sermon. All ancient worship was involved in the Offering of Sacrifices to GOD for the Sins of the people. Day after day, for Centuries, people giving you their sins, their pain and fears and separation from GOD, attempting to atone for these with Sacrifice of a Bull, a Ram, a year's Wages to BARTER for their Sins.

This week we had an E Blast, about a City Bus at the end of day filled with angry people complaining, and the Driver invited that as each person left, he would hold out his hand for them to give him their pain. Then on his way home, he would stop the bus on the Bridge and let go all of their pain into the river to wash this away.

Once a year, once each year, the High Priest took all of the people's sins and prayers into the Holy of Holies, the inner most Sanctuary of the Temple, where no one else ever dared to enter, for the High Priest to stand before GOD baring all the Sins and all the Sacrifices of the People; as the High Priest prayed to be able to Live, so as to come out to offer forgiveness and hope to the people. HERE, Isaiah the High Priest confesses this text, which is regularly described as "The Suffering Servant Song," naming the pain of belief in GOD. Faith in GOD is not a VACCINATION granting immunity from Suffering, Pain, Sin. Much harder, TRUST in GOD mandates that we reconcile our hurt, our wounds WITH trusting the ALMIGHTY GOD. WHY GOD?

In the Book of Acts this same passage appears, being read by the Ethiopian Eunuch, Priest of a different religion, seated in a Chariot, when the Apostle Phillip runs alongside. The Ethiopian asks whom this is about, whether Isaiah, or the People of Faith, or someone else, and Phillip uses these words of Isaiah to interpret that this was WHO JESUS IS, who came as the Son of God, yet suffered and died for us, causing the Ethiopian Eunuch wanting to believe in this way to ask what prevents him from being One Baptized?

Jesus asking Who do you Believe I AM, comes up at least twice every year. Usually preachers describe the difficulty for the Early Church in shifting from Jesus the Rabbi, Mary and the Carpenter's Son, BEING the

Messiah who is one with GOD. 2) We also describe the importance and difficulty of accepting that Jesus is fully Human and fully Divine. He was not just a GOD pretending to be dead. He was not just a MAN. As described by Isaiah, Jesus was Called by GOD, given Wisdom to know all that GOD experiences of Life and he was not rebellious. More than Wisdom, Jesus also experienced the pain of being whipped and beaten, of having people hit your face and spit upon you. Which is the point at which, BECAUSE OF THE LORD, Jesus was able to not be disgraced. 3) Sometimes Preachers will also identify that WHEN JESUS ASKS WHO I AM, we remember that the words "I AM" are the NAME OF GOD given to Moses at the Burning Bush. This morning, I wanted to go in yet, two additional directions.

Whether 60, 70, 80, 90 years, or older than that, all of our lives we have accumulated wisdom and experience; SO WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE WHEN YOU GROW UP? What is next for you at this stage? Life is not over because we are part of AARP! We may move slower, although watching Wednesday Line Dancing, I am not convinced of that. We may no longer be gainfully employed (although a few of us still are) yet we have this lifetime of ascending to the pinnacle of careers. What shall we do with this WISDOM? What is NEXT? We are not here WAITING to DIE!

I have witnessed this population which all the world believed could never learn technology, adapt and participate in ZOOM; to use technology to order groceries; to start the car without a choke or clutch or even a key in the ignition; to communicate on a phone without being plugged into a place.

So What Do You Want to Do With the Rest of Your Life? As I was writing this, this week, I had a phone Call from someone who described that his father had always had a private personal faith. Then, after they had retired, after his first wife died, suddenly everything he had heard about God through his lifetime seemed to click, he became a Stephen Minister and regularly went to Assisted Care facilities and Hospitals to listen to people, offering care. Something he never had time for, never would have imagined doing, until he became the man he was when finally he grew up, which happened long after 65.

A different direction I have never before heard considered with these passages, is to wonder WHAT DO WE WANT TO BE AS THE CHURCH? We have overcome the International Trend of Churches Dying, our Church is growing, all of our immediate needs are met, probably in January we will renovate our Kitchen...

If this Church is the Body of Christ, and Jesus asked his Disciples "WHO DO YOU BELIEVE I AM?" then What Do You Want THIS BODY our Church to Be? Two years ago we started asking that question, and because of your responses, We are now: WORKING WITH THE TOHONA O'ODHAM people; we are ASSISTING STRUGGLING CHURCHES; We are working for the RENOVATION OF OUR KITCHEN. Recognize, that the hard years we experienced and the years of COVID demonstrate the agonies and struggles of the Suffering Servant Song as described by Isaiah.

After serving Churches for more than 20 years I suddenly came to recognize that while I would never wish hardship, enduring prejudice and struggle, on anyone, Everyone I have ever known who lived through struggle has come out stronger in their faith because of that tempering.

For the Ethiopian Eunuch Priest to be ONE BAPTIZED, for us to accept a new CALLING AT THIS STAGE, for us to BE THE CHURCH, is as described in the book of JAMES, to keep the whole body in check with a BRIDLE not a whip, not spurs, simply to follow the direction where our noses are pointed. To balance the forces of WIND, CURRENTS and STORMS, with the small rudder of faith. We have had examples all of our lives: The Leader who bares the humiliation of enduring their faith for what must be done;

The Bus Driver who picked up all we left behind; The

Priest who took all our sins to GOD, knowing full well GOD could kill them;

The person in the Hospital Waiting Room, who listened. WHO

DO WE WANT TO BE WHEN WE GROW UP?