

“If You Say So”

Meditation Preached by The Rev. Jennifer Cameron

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Scripture Texts: Psalm 138

I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart;

before the gods I sing your praise;

² I bow down toward your holy temple

and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness;

for you have exalted your name and your word

above everything.

³ On the day I called, you answered me,

you increased my strength of soul.

⁴ All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O Lord,

for they have heard the words of your mouth.

⁵ They shall sing of the ways of the Lord,

for great is the glory of the Lord.

⁶ For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly;

but the haughty he perceives from far away.

⁷ Though I walk in the midst of trouble,

you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies;

you stretch out your hand,

and your right hand delivers me.

⁸ The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me;

your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever.

Do not forsake the work of your hands.

Luke 5:1-11

Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, ² he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³ He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. ⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” ⁵ Simon answered, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.” ⁶ When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. ⁷ So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. ⁸ But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” ⁹ For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; ¹⁰ and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be

catching people.”¹¹ When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

Meditation

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

As I listened to Phyllis reading the Scriptures for today, I noticed how much the Psalm spoke to me. *On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul.* I find I’ve been calling for strength from God a lot lately, and patience, and healing, and, and, and... I’m glad I can because there is no way I could get through some of – any of – life’s events without it. There’s no way I can summon the strength I need from within myself because it just isn’t there. It would be rather arrogant of me, and foolish, to think I can. That’s why God is God, and, thankfully, I’m not.

The closing verse of Psalm 138 spoke pretty loudly to me to. *The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.* The Contemporary English Version presents this verse as: *You, Lord, will always treat me with kindness. Your love never fails. You have made us what we are. Don’t give up on us now!* Amazing. I am the work of God’s hands. I am what God has made me to be. That’s a humbling thought. I am not some random thing that came into existence out of nowhere. I was purposely and lovingly created by **the** Creator. It reminds me of another Psalm, Psalm 139: *For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.* Fearfully and wonderfully made. Made on purpose for a purpose. Knit together from a one-of-a-kind pattern.

I’m a knitter, not one that takes on complicated and intricate patterns, but I do enjoy knitting. It is fascinating to see a strand of yarn take on shape and detail, to become something new and beautiful. My focus at the moment is on teddy bears for the next generation of the family. New little ones get an “Aunt Jenn” bear. I’m going to be a great-aunt for the third time this year, so while I finish one for the most recent addition to the family, I’m already planning out colours and accents for the one we are waiting for. I make the bears for two reasons. The first is so our wee ones have a safe and soft toy to play or cuddle with. The second, and more lasting reason is that I adore my nieces and nephews and want to show them my love by giving a gift of love to their children. Making and giving these teddy bears gives me great joy, and the pictures I receive of our babies with their bears warms my heart. I treasure those pictures because I treasure those babies and their parents. It’s something I can do to show them I care.

One of the purposes we are all called to fulfill as children of the living God is to show God’s love to others. I, for one, am very happy to fulfill that purpose.

Today our denomination is recognizing the ministry of development and relief that is provided by Presbyterian World Service and Development, PWS&D. As I read the stories of the help, education, emergency relief and support that is so generously offered by the PWS&D staff and partner agencies with which they work, I know this is a genuine ministry to which these

people are called. PWS&D is not just another disaster relief charity. It is a living and active part of the body of Christ, the church. It has a purpose – to provide what is needed in urgent and ongoing support for people in Canada and around the world as they reach out with the love of God revealed in Jesus. Here is a description of this agency from the PWS&D website: Inspired by God’s promise of abundant life, Presbyterian World Service & Development (PWS&D) envisions a sustainable, compassionate and just world. This year marks 75 years of those values guiding us as we respond to hunger, poverty, injustice and disaster. Together, we are working to support and empower people all over the world. Through PWS&D, our church works with communities in our global village to restore human dignity, ease the pain of want and promote community cooperation that benefits all. Together, we are promoting human rights and supporting refugees. Faithful to our calling, we respond together.

We are glad to give our support to these servants of Christ. We are called to follow Jesus and model his example of caring for the poor and the marginalized, and PWS&D is one way of fulfilling that purpose. Some are called to be the active agents of God’s love and grace and some are called to share that love and grace with these workers with our gifts and prayers. Each is equally as important as the other. Each is a God-given purpose. And we are called to respond in the ways we can with the gifts we have been given. We are to respond to God’s call to follow where Jesus leads us.

As a church in the Reformed tradition, call is of major significance for us. God draws us in and leads us to do what we have been made to do, to serve as we have been made to serve. One of my daily devotions this week reflected on how people are called to serve, even if they seem to be the most unlikely.

“Simon and Andrew had been disciples of John the Baptist, who came before Christ, preparing the way. But one day Jesus walked by, and John said to them, ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’ (John 1:29 NKJV).

As a result, Simon and Andrew transferred their allegiance from John to Jesus, but they still didn’t fully understand who Jesus was or what He had come to do.

The Bible also mentions James and John, to whom Jesus gave a special title: ‘Sons of Thunder’ (Mark 3:17 NKJV). I sort of envision James and John as outlaw biker types who showed up one day, and Jesus called them to be part of the team.

Certainly, His disciples were an eclectic group of people. But it’s important to note that all of these men were doing something when Jesus called them. Andrew was throwing a net into the water along with Simon. And James and John were in a boat repairing their nets.

We see the same elsewhere in Scripture. David, who later became the king of Israel, was watching over his flock when the prophet Samuel summoned him. Moses, too, was watching over a flock when God spoke to him through a burning bush. Elisha was plowing in a field when Elijah called him to carry on the prophetic ministry.

People were busy when God called them.

In the same way, if you want God to use you in His kingdom, then get busy doing something for Him. Just start with what is in front of you. Mend and cast those nets, so to speak. Tend those

sheep. Plow those fields. Teach that Sunday school class. Go on that mission trip. Share one on one. Give that tithe.

Just get out and do something. Do what you can, where you can.” (Greg Laurie)

You know that phrase, if you want something done ask a busy person? Jesus needed something done, and he asked some busy people filling important roles in their communities. Simon was a fisher. He worked hard and long hours to fulfill his task of supplying a staple item in his community’s diet. I can only imagine the look on his face when Jesus told him to put his nets down into the water, when Simon has just finished a long night of unsuccessful fishing. His response sounds like he’s humouring Jesus. *Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.* Today that may sound something like, *Seriously? We just wasted a whole night catching nothing and you want us to do more? Fine. If you say so...* Maybe there was an eyeroll or some head shaking that accompanied Simon’s response, but there was obviously something in Jesus’ words that drew him to do what the Lord said. Was it in response to Jesus’ teaching that day? We don’t know, but something, I dare say the Holy Spirit, prompted Simon to say, “if you say so.” James and John were a part of this event too as they were Simon’s partners. I can picture them standing in the other boat with their mouths hanging open and their eyes wide as they saw the catch. They couldn’t explain it, but they dragged in the overloaded nets and filled the boats.

Simon’s response is legendary: *he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!”* He knew he was in the presence of a miracle worker, one who taught unlike any other. This was more than another traveling prophet. This was something, someone, different. But rather than ask to stay with Jesus, Simon tells him to go away from him! He feels unworthy to be in his presence because he is a sinner – just the kind of person Jesus came for! He seems fearful to be in the presence of this miracle-worker. But Jesus, as he does so often, speaks the words we find so familiar: *Do not be afraid.* And the fear leaves. Then, *from now on you will be catching people.* And Simon, James, John, and possibly others took an action that continued Simon’s response: if you say so. They left everything behind to follow him. They left family, community, security, business to follow this prophet that had given them far more than they expected. He had taught them. He had amazed them. He had called them. He would lead them to cast the net of his healing, hope-filled word to draw more people into his fold. He would continue to amaze them. He would continue to teach them. He would equip them to carry on his ministry after he had fulfilled his purpose. And they would continue to cast the net of the Gospel everywhere they went, in word and in deed.

To close, I’d like to turn our hearts and minds back to the ministry of Presbyterian World Service and Development. The church is called to care for those in need of help and support. I’d like to share the agency’s theological statement as we reflect on what that looks like in terms of relief and development:

The ministry of PWS&D is rooted in the living hope of Jesus Christ and inspired by God’s promise of abundant life. It is an integral part of the ministry of The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

God enters into faithful relationship with those who respond to the divine calling. As Micah proclaimed, God requires that we “do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God” (6:8). In Jesus, God became human for our salvation. This love for humanity expressed in Jesus’ life must be demonstrated by the church and we follow him as we live for justice, mercy and peace. We believe peace and well-being are God’s will for creation. As we respond together to the world’s pain and despair, we bear witness to the love of God among us. We believe that injustice and inequality are an affront to the will of God and that our involvement in compassionate ministry with people throughout the world is an imperative of the Gospel.

We are drawn to respond to the divine calling to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. Last year, as we all struggled to deal with the pandemic, its restrictions and limitations in our own lives and community, St. Columba responded to that call with generous financial support for the ministry and mission of PWS&D. As the pastor of this congregation, I am humbled to see the obvious compassion and concern expressed through your givings to help those who help people throughout this nation and around the world. It is an imperative of the Gospel to respond to need, and this is one way we live out that Gospel call.

Made on purpose for a purpose. God calls us through Christ to fulfill a purpose. Our response is to say, “if you say so, I will follow.” Then we must follow where we are led, and do what God equips us to do, even if it doesn’t make much sense to us. Because God has said so, and we shall make it so. Amen.