

Isaiah 49:1-7

John 1:29-42

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May I speak to you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Hi. This is a very weird week for me. On Saturday I'm scheduled to be ordained a deacon. So I've been thinking a lot about vocation lately. It's been difficult for me to focus on anything else, when this....event, this focus of so many hopes and longings, is almost here. People keep asking me if I'm excited. I am. But it also feels so surreal to finally be at this point. My vocation in the church is something that God has been calling me towards my whole life. Everything I've done has been in response to that calling, one way or another.

People talk about vocation in a couple of ways. One way is what we hear in school. Vocational training. Training for a job, for a career. Every job requires some training, whether it's an advanced degree or an apprenticeship. Doing a job that needs doing and that you're equipped to do can definitely be a vocation. But I want to talk about vocation in another way.

When someone talks about their vocation, they are often talking about their "calling," the thing they feel they are meant to do, or that gives their life meaning. There's a connection between those words, vocation and calling. Vocation comes to us through the Latin word that means call. We usually hear this verb used in the passive voice "I am called to be..." "We are called to do..." But someone, someone is calling us to do it. When we put the subject back in the sentence: \*God\* is calling us. That's what vocation is. Vocation is what God calls us to.

A couple weeks ago I went to a baby shower for one of my best friends. For the first activity, we all wrote down 3 words that we thought would describe her baby. Lots of people put "intelligent" and "clever" and those words for sure describe the parents. People said "kind" and "curious" and all of the traits that we want for our children. It was a fun activity, and got everyone sharing their hopes and blessings for this new child. None of us know exactly who this baby will become. No one knows if this child will be good at math like her mom or love board games like her dad. No one knows if this child will be called to be a teacher or find a vocation as marine biologist or what.

I wonder what God would have said for that baby shower game. God who, as Isaiah says, "called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me." God, speaking through the prophet Isaiah, calls his servant Israel to gather his people together, to be a light to all nations, to bring salvation to the whole earth. God formed his servant in the womb to fulfill that purpose, for that vocation. Even before we are born, God has a purpose, a vocation for us. What we have to do is recognize it. What we have to do is follow that calling. Learning to hear God's call in our lives is something that we all have to do in our own lives. And it's also something that we do with each other. Vocation is what God calls us to do. And vocation is also something that other people recognize in us.

I wonder what calling God has for my friend's baby. What adjectives would God use to describe that child? Maybe the baby shower game is one kinda silly way for us to recognize someone's vocation. What characteristics do we see? What do we recognize in a person? It's silly, to think that we can recognize a baby's vocation before they are even born! When we do something like that it probably says more about what we think of the parents than what is true about the baby! But there is something important here. Vocation is not just what God calls us to, vocation is something that is recognized by other people. Probably we have to wait a bit to see what sort of person my friend's baby turns out to be. Just like the world had to wait until Jesus was an adult to publicly recognize his vocation.

In the gospel lesson today, we hear from John the Baptist, and we meet some new disciples of Jesus, Andrew and his brother Simon Peter. John starts us off with an astonishing claim: Jesus, the man who John just baptized, is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. John's been out here at the river, baptizing people with water, waiting for the

promised Messiah. John didn't know who the Messiah was going to turn out to be. John didn't know what Jesus' vocation was beforehand. But when Jesus was baptized, the spirit of God descended and remained upon him.

It was then that John recognized Jesus as the one he was looking for. It was then that John declared that this man, Jesus, was the Lamb of God. People had asked if John himself was the Messiah, but John had said, no, his vocation was to prepare the way, and the Messiah was still on his way. And now here he is, Jesus, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

In this gospel according to John, this is the first moment where the man Jesus is recognized for who he is. This is the first moment where Jesus is revealed as the Son of God by the spirit descending upon him. This is the moment where Jesus's vocation is recognized by other people.

According to the other gospel accounts, however, this is not the first time that John and Jesus meet and recognize each other. In Luke's gospel, John leaps for joy inside Elizabeth's womb when she meets Mary, who is pregnant with Jesus. John is already announcing who Jesus is, and neither of them were even born yet. "The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me." Vocation is what God has been calling us to be from the very beginning of our existence! And vocation is also John leaping in the womb in recognition of Jesus. Vocation is the spirit descending upon Jesus so that everyone recognizes him to be the Son of God.

Andrew and some other disciples of John see John's recognition of Jesus's vocation and decide to check it out for themselves. I wonder what they learned from Jesus that afternoon. They recognized that he was a rabbi, a teacher, at the beginning. And by the end of the day, Andrew tells his brother Simon that they have found the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed one. Jesus is recognized for who he is and his vocation is declared publicly. Jesus of course had his vocation from before he was born, but this was when his vocation was recognized publicly. This is when Jesus truly got to work. This is when the vocational training would be put to use. Vocation is what God calls us to do. And vocation is what people recognize in us.

When Jesus met Simon, he recognized what was in him. He immediately calls him Cephas, Peter, or, in English, Rock. Jesus recognizes qualities in Simon that deserved to be called out. Simon's vocation as a solid, foundation stone kind of guy, is made clear when Jesus calls him Peter. Jesus, his own vocation just having been declared publicly, immediately begins to do the same for others.

I'm so grateful for the ways that this church has supported me in my vocation over the past 2 years. You have recognized and nurtured my vocation in ways that I didn't know were possible. I'm grateful for the ways that this church supports the vocations of each one of us.

Because God truly has called each of us before we were born. While we were in our mothers' wombs he named us. Like Jesus recognizing Simon as Peter, this community recognizes each other as the people God calls us to be. And it really does take a community's recognition to realize a vocation. None of us are doing this alone. Vocation is that internal, eternal call from God, and that vocation is made external and present when other people realize and recognize it.

Vocation is what God calls us to. Vocation is what other people recognize in us.

Amen.

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Pronouns: she/her/ella