

Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
The Reverend Dr Scott Everett Couper
Sunday, January 16, 2022
Second Sunday after Epiphany / Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

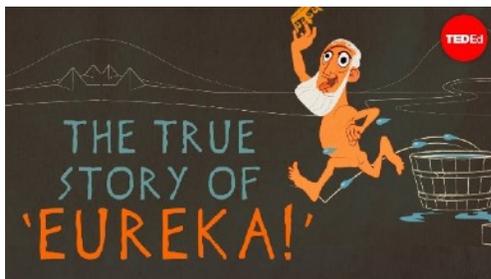
“Eureka! Finding Your Calling”

Second of three sermons in a series on Epiphany entitled “Faith’s *Eureka!*”

Christian Scripture: I Corinthians 12:1-11



Last week, we learned that the word ‘*Eureka*’ is an exclamation from ancient Greece that means “I have found it!”



The exclamation is attributed to Archimedes who, when in the bath, discovered a mathematical principle attributed to volume and became so excited that he jumped-out, forgot to dress, and ran nude down the street shouting ‘Eureka’!



We also learned that 'epiphany' can have many meanings. An epiphany can be a divine manifestation (like Jesus himself). It can be a message from a star, or an announcement from angelic messengers, or a declaration from the Holy Spirit (such as during Jesus' Baptism). Or, an epiphany can be our own personal "Ah ha!" moment when we make a 'God-connection'.



This morning as we continue our series celebrating Epiphany, I would like to speak to you about 'calling'. A calling is a divine urging to fulfill a certain purpose in life. A calling can be a humble passion to volunteer for a specific issue or charity. Or, a calling can be more substantive, and thus vocational, such that one's entire life almost revolves around it. Sadly, too often people understand 'callings' are

limited to ordained ministers. This is deeply troubling to me since *every person* of faith has a calling. If you are a Christian, *you* have a calling. If you are here in this worship service, *you* have calling. As we begin the New Year, I believe it is imperative that all of us at Centre Church, if we have not already, should discover our calling.



Tomorrow, our country and much of the world will recognize Martin Luther King Day and so do we today. Though King felt called to the ordained ministry, King's calling was not revealed to him like it was to Moses through a burning bush or like it was to Paul through a blinding light on the road to Damascus. In 1959, Martin Luther King composed a short statement that revealed how it was that he entered the ministry: "My call to the ministry was neither dramatic nor spectacular. It came neither by some miraculous vision nor by some blinding light experience on the road of life. Moreover, it did not come as a sudden realization. Rather, it was a response to an inner urge that gradually came upon me. This urge expressed itself in a desire to serve God and humanity, and the feeling that my talent and my commitment could best be expressed through the

ministry. At first, I planned to be a physician; then I turned my attention in the direction of law. But as I passed through the preparation stages of these two professions, I still felt within that undying urge to serve God and humanity through the ministry. During my senior year in college, I finally decided to accept the challenge to enter the ministry. I came to see that God had placed a responsibility upon my shoulders and the more I tried to escape it the more frustrated I would become. A few months after preaching my first sermon I entered theological seminary. This, in brief, is an account of my call and pilgrimage to the ministry.”¹

King highlighted one of two points I wish to make this morning.



One, calling is, more often than not, resisted despite its nagging allure. If you are resisting a particular urging, it is most likely your calling! Moses resisted his calling to oppose Pharaoh and become the liberator of his people. Jonah resisted

¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., “My Call to the Ministry”, The Stanford Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, The King Papers, August 7, 1959. Found at: <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/my-call-ministry>, accessed, January 15, 2022.

preaching repentance to those whom he despised, the Assyrians. Elijah resisted his calling, and Jeremiah his. Jesus resisted his calling. Remember? “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me...” (Luke 22:42).



I resisted my calling, and truth be told, sometimes I still do. For my undergraduate degree, I studied International Relations, not Religion. As all of you know, I am very much interested in politics – so human rights work, advocacy, and social justice on a global scale interest me. In college, I lobbied Congress on Capitol Hill. Yet, the following summer an invitation brought me to Promised Land State Park (PA) at the age of nineteen to be a seasonal local church pastor and chaplain. My first position in South Africa was supposed to be at an anti-apartheid NGO, but when that fell through I was appointed to a serve as a minister of a church which was exactly what I did *not* want to do. During the height of the HIV and AIDS pandemic in southern Africa, I raised money for HIV and AIDS work, but I was also appointed to serve a local church. For my next appointment, I became an

archivist and a museum curator while, again, also serving as a local church pastor. For my PhD, I studied History. It actually took me almost three years longer than it should have to earn a PhD in History because I specifically did NOT want to get one in Theology and had to take years of additional classes. It seemed I was good at writing, publishing, researching, and lecturing. I gravitated to academics. After I received my PhD, I taught at three institutions of higher learning, including the School for International Training. Yet, while working at three universities, I was, again, appointed as the minister of a local church. Finally, after resisting local church ministry for so long, I felt a full-time calling to Centre Church rather than to academics. It is here with all of you that I have found that to which God calls me.



This morning, I want you to ask yourself – what am I resisting, from what am I running away, what have I avoided, what have I stalled and ignored? Friends, that is most likely your calling. Seize it! I don't care whether you are nine or ninety, stop resisting and start following your call.

Our scripture reading this morning directs us to my second, and last, point this morning.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS			
BELIEVING	ENCOURAGING	MENTORING	SPEAKING OUT
COMFORTING	EVANGELIZING	ORGANIZING	SUPPORTING
DIRECTING	GIVING	PIONEERING	TEACHING
DISCERNING	LEARNING	PROBLEM-SOLVING	

What are your gifts or what is your life experience that has provided you wisdom, knowledge, empathy, and purpose? You see, in addition to paying attention to what you are avoiding, you need to pay attention to your gifts. And believe me, often gifts for calling are not necessarily extraordinary. Look at mine! I only like to talk (I have a gift for the gab, one might say) and I love people, even hard to love people. Those are my gifts – arguably they are my *only* gifts for this ministry. My gift certainly isn't preaching! And we all have a gift, some are rare and some quite common and simple like mine. Yet, we all have a gift. The number-one reason people do not fulfil their calling is that they do not perceive their gift! I want everyone here this morning to know this – if you are created by God, you have a God-given gift. Find it! If you are living and breathing, you have a gift! Acknowledge it! If you are a person with a mustard seed of faith and are worshipping in this service, you have a gift. Use it!



The apostle Paul preached to the Corinthians that God bestows upon us a variety of gifts and the gifts “are apportioned to each one individually as God wills” (I Corinthians 12:11). Heidi has the gift of writing and art, A.J. knows home improvement, Gabi and Sue of organizing people, Mary of music, Jenifer of technology, Nan of education, Priscilla brings ideas and passion, Dart finances, and Bonnie is the honey that attracts others to us (she has a gift for hospitality). I look forward to hearing what Caitlin and Tom’s, Beth and John’s, and Celestine’s gifts bring to the community of faith, for what Paul rightly terms, the “common good” (I Corinthians 12:7).

Friends, stop resisting your calling. Place your time and energy in that which God has given you. No matter your gift, with it discern your calling.

This was the Word of God. And it was delivered to the People of God. And the People of God responded, “Amen!”