**January 19, 2020**

**Isaiah 49:1-8; John 1:29-42**

Presbyterians are famous for our doctrine of predestination which states that God has a plan for us. More specifically, it is the belief that God knows ahead of time (God has foreknowledge) of what we will do (our destinations). Pre-destination. Even more specifically, this is a belief that God knows our ultimate and eternal destination – essentially God knows and has intention behind our salvation and eternal home. Pre-destination. It isn’t a roadmap of all our daily destinations – what choices we’ll make, what turns we’ll take, and all the minutia of life – but is a portrait of our forever home. For us to believe such a thing is to believe that there is connection and relationship between God and creation.

Isaiah’s servant song in Chapter 49 tells of that beautiful beginning in our relationship. Echoing Psalm 139, the prophet wrote of how God knew us in the womb; God knew us before we were able to be known by anyone else. God named us – before our own parents named us. And from our earliest days, God had a plan for us. “You are my servant, in whom I will be glorified.” God shaped us and polished us and hid us away until the time was right. Until we could be “a light to the nations.” God chose us for glorious work.

According to Isaiah, my faith journey began before I was born. While I was still “in my mother’s womb,” God named me: Mary Margaret. My call story began with relationship. God named me by my grandmothers. God called me already beloved names, and set about perfecting me for exactly what God intended. Before my parents knew that I would be strong-willed. Before my best friend would call me, “Meggie.” Before I loved animals as much as St. Francis, or the outdoors as much as St. Patrick, or chocolate as much as Willy Wonka. God already held me in his hands, loving me, calling my name, molding me and shaping me into God’s chosen servant. God polished me and hid me and put me in God’s own tool chest until the time was right.

But I didn’t *know* that. Or if I did, I forgot it by the time I started to *know* what I know. So my life became a game of walking backwards to discover the truth that was already there. Like any hero on their journey, needing to encounter others and challenging situations to best understand the fullness of who they are, we are blessed with people to point to God’s call that is already at work within us.

People who had already discovered the truth started helping me uncover this myself. My father read Bible stories to me out of an old storybook from his own childhood, bound with purple cloth. When he read these stories and prayed with me before bed, he gave me a simple daily practice of faith. Mrs. Moore was one of my Sunday School teachers who led me through sword drills (races to find a Bible verse) which introduced me to a lot of scripture, simply putting my hands and eyes on the books and words. Jonathan was a youth leader who took time to lead me in Bible study and was patient to listen to silly and serious questions. Mrs. Vann was a church member who invited me to be part of church committees, then drove me to the meetings, showing me that service was an important part of faith, and that I had a place at church (and work to do) that wasn’t just in a Sunday School room. Bethany is a friend from seminary who continues to pray with me and for me, reminding me that faith is not accomplished alone. Many, many people helped me (and continue to help me) learn about God’s claim on me. Many people showed me a glimmer of the glory to which God called me. I don’t know where it will all lead. I don’t know the fullness of God’s plans for me; I don’t know where God will lead next week or next month or next year; but going day to day, much like those first disciples who only followed Jesus to see where he was staying[[1]](#footnote-1), I follow God to the next stop. (I’m on a need-to-know basis with God, and most of the time, I don’t need to know where our journey is headed.)

In Isaiah’s passage and in the Gospel reading, I hear that God has a call for us. I don’t hear the specifics of the call, nor does it seem important to God that we understand the specifics or our final destination. Only that we respond to God by putting one foot in front of the other and taking steps to follow God’s voice. For God’s plan may be best known simply by following one small step at a time. Listening to the voice that knows us best. Following the One who calls us to glory.

This morning I would like to give you time to think about your own call story. Grab a pen or pencil from your pew, turn over your bulletin, and jot down one or two words to these questions. Think of all those who have amplified God’s call in your life.

 What is your earliest memory of church? Is it about someone? Who was that (friend, teacher, parent)? Is it of some place? or a song or story? What names come to mind? What feelings did you have? What sounds did you hear or things did you see?

 What is your earliest memory of what God made you to be or to do? (a particular interest or ability, a hope or a dream) What form or shape did God give you?

From the beginning, what do you remember knowing about *God*/faith? a story? theology (that God loves you)

 Think of a time in your life when you needed God. What was happening? How did you know God was with you (or not)? How did that affect the way you dealt with other things?

 Think of a time in your life when you chose to follow God. As Jesus told his first disciples in John’s Gospel, “Come and see,” where did you go and what did you see? What was happening?

 From wherever you are today, seeing with clear or cloudy vision, what shape or form has God given to your life? What themes do you see? What gifts? What challenges?

Take 5 minutes to share their story.

1. John 1:38-39 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)