

Sermon - 5/27/18
Isaiah 6: 11-8
Day of Pentecost
Davidson College Presbyterian Church - Davidson, NC
Larry Lyon

More than 50 years ago, I would visit his small home, down Fort Hunt Road, over in Hollin Hall, where he and his wife lived a quiet, humble existence.

Mr. Tiedemann. He was nothing flashy. Maybe he even was a little awkward. But in my life, he made a difference.

He led me, one on one, through a curriculum of vocational guidance put out by the Presbyterian church. For the first time, I began to understand of language of **call**, that God might be calling even skinny and introverted Larry Lyon to something bigger, that God might indeed have a meaningful plan for my life.

The curriculum ended with a two-day trip to Mary Baldwin College in the mountains of Virginia. I and two other teen-age boys who had graduated from the same curriculum traveled by train, without an adult chaperone and stayed alone in a Holiday Inn in Staunton, Va., We even behaved ourselves, and we took a battery of tests that helped us discern what our particular gifts were, and probably, still are.

Understand that we **all** have gifts. Every one of us. The gifts vary enormously. The challenge is to figure out those gifts, and then use them, in a way that not only gives us personal fulfillment, but in some way, **glorifies** God. To **God** be the glory, forever and ever.

“Vocation”. It is actually a huge word in Presbyterian theology. We believe God is **calling** us, to be something, to do something, God is continually calling us, at 14, at 67, even 87. I have a 98-year-old aunt, Margaret, whom we call Aunt Bet. Bet doesn’t know why she is still living. She says that to me, every time, how ready she is to die. But we visit, and I leave feeling better, and I think to myself, God is still using Bet for a purpose.

The word vocation comes from the Latin vocare, to call, and means the work a human being is called to by **God**.

Now back when I was a teenager, in a time long ago, I did not know there was a Presbyterian writer and thinker named Frederick Buechner, who is even older than me, and who himself is big on the language of call. Buechner writes that there are all different kinds of voices calling you to all different kinds of work, and the problem is to find out which is the voice of **God** rather than of society, say, or the Superego, or Self-Interest.

Our egos compete with God. So does our sense of self-interest and self-preservation. The challenge is to **recognize** from where your sense of call is coming.

To help with that. Buechner offers this:

The place God calls you..... is the place where your deep gladnessand the world’s deep hunger meet.

Your deep gladness.... the world’s deep hunger...ask yourself, where do they meet? What good **can** you do? What good **will** you do?

(pause)

Isaiah had a call. As calls go, it was rather spectacular. It is described here, and it involved seraphs and thresholds shaking and temples filling with smoke, a moviemaker’s dream scene.

And of course. Isaiah felt unworthy. When we are called, often our first reaction is this: we can’t do that. We are unworthy. Surely God must be mistaken. Isaiah put it this way:

Woe is me!

I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips.

Whoa, not woe, but whoa.... Did you hear that one?

I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips.

I don't know how **you** feel, but I will tell you how I feel. I feel at times that we as a nation have become lost. We are lost in greed and we are lost in self-centeredness and we are lost in something I didn't even used to understand. but I sure do now, and that is the plague of narcissism.

And along with these things has come a proliferation of unclean lips. People insulting one another, slamming one another, judging one another, even cussing one another when one perceives one's parking place is taken before you can get there. *They stole my parking place!!*

For some reason, and I will let you decide the reason, but for some reason unclean lip dialogue has entered the public sphere in a big way. And perhaps because it has, we all indulge, more than we should.

If your mouths have opened in the last 24 hours, I suspect you may have uttered something "unclean" or close enough to it. Something profane, something hurtful, something stupid, something gossipy, something unnecessary, something harsh, something judgmental. If you have not, God bless you.

But Isaiah's lips, your lips, my lips, at times are unclean. The good news is this: we are not alone. We live among a people of unclean lips.

The even better news is this: despite that, God can use us. God can use us to do big things.

(pause)

In 1995, I answered what I believed to be God's call. I left a job I mostly loved, I left a boss I totally loved, we left a place that had become our home, in every good sense of the word. We got up, and we moved, to Virginia.

I landed in seminary that summer. I was 44. My first class was Hebrew. The professor walked in, a minute or two late, and without a single introductory word, launched into a recitation of the Hebrew alphabet.

Woe is me, I thought. If I wasn't lost before then, I felt lost at that moment. I was lost in Hebrew class, I was lost in theology class, I was fairly lost altogether, but I faked it pretty well. I smiled. I was kind. People didn't seem to realize how little I knew.

Things got better, thanks be to God.

As I look back over my second career, I have met some of the finest people I have ever met. These days I practically meet a new one every day. I have served, served God, alongside some incredible disciples of Jesus, both clergy and laypeople. I have been on these cool mission trips, I have officiated at hundreds of weddings, I have had the blessing to help families through grief, and I have witnessed enough pain and suffering that my own compassion, my own compassion for people and what they endure, has grown monumentally. And I have enough anecdotes to be able to bore people around the dinner table now and forever.

Unclean lips, yes.

God didn't care. God can use us, anytime, anywhere.

(pause)

What the world needs now, I believe, is love. More specifically, what the world needs now is people who not only about talk about Jesus, but who seek to live Jesus, who not only talk about love, but do love.

The passage from Isaiah, remember, also says, your guilt has departed and your sin has been blotted out." There it is, the Assurance of Pardon, the declaration of forgiveness. We say it every Sunday around here

Friends, you and your unclean lips, me and my unclean lips, they are forgiven. Start over. Try again. The ability to do so is called grace, and I believe God grants it to us, and it is amazing, and we are free, every day, each day, to seek to love, that day, this day.

The Lord said, whom shall I send?

Isaiah said, Here I am, Lord, send me.

Send the Davidson College Presbyterian Church.

This church has been around since before the Civil War.

It has stood here, on this corner of the Davidson College campus, for a long time. Its people have done good things.

I believe this church now has a golden opportunity. God is love, says First John. Love God, love neighbor, says Jesus. DCPC has an opportunity to stand for love, and in doing so, stand for Christ.

DCPC can welcome people, people of all races, people of all genders, people of all sexual orientation. DCPC can welcome inquiring minds, inquisitive minds, curious minds, open minds, people wondering, truly, what God is calling them to be and to do.

DCPC can stand not for judgment nor pretentiousness nor holier than thouness; DCPC can help people turn on to a loving God, and not be turned off by an unloving people.

Davidson College Presbyterian Church has an opportunity to stand, to stand firmly, for the God of love.

Last Saturday morning, I was half awake, sitting on the couch, with Martha, watching a redhead named Harry marry a bi-racial woman named Meghan.

And suddenly there was this preacher, a preacher named Michael, and he preached a sermon that I will never forget. He woke me up. Did he ever. If you have not seen it, or heard it, you need to. Google it. Go to You Tube.

Among his words were the:

Imagine this tired old world where love is the way. When love is the way – unselfish, sacrificial, redemptive.

When love is the way, then no child will ever go to bed hungry again.

When love is the way, we will let justice roll down like a mighty stream and righteousness like an ever-flowing brook.

When love is the way, poverty...will become history. When love is the way, the earth....will be....a sanctuary..

When love is the way, we will lay down our swords and shields, down by the riverside, to study war no more.”

When love is the way, there’s plenty good room – plenty good room – for all of God’s children.

Because when love is the way, we actually treat each other, well....like we are **actually** family.

When love is the way, we know that God is the source of us, and we are brothers and sisters, children of God.”

Amen, Brother Michael, AMEN.

In a little while, we will stand together, and we will sing “I The Lord of Sea and Sky” and among its words will be
I will break their hearts of stone, give them hearts for love alone.”

That, friends, I believe, ultimately, is what God is calling each of us to do, as the body of..... **Christ**.

To God be the glory.

Amen