

Newsletter reflections for July

Reclaiming what we have been called to do.

Being called is a theme which appears often throughout the narrative we have of our relationship with God--YHWH, the Holy One of Israel, the Triune God of Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Being chosen is another prevalent theme, and one often interwoven with being called. To a great extent, they are two sides of the same thing. We are chosen so that as Abraham was told—chosen to be a blessing to all nations. As someone in the Reformed/Presbyterian tradition, when I began to consider ministry, it began as a response to a meditation/prayer that I made while on a retreat. I was trying to figure out what to do with the empty space in my life which occurred after the death of my husband and mother. The response to that prayer was a sense/a feeling that was verbalized as being called to serve God. The how that was to be accomplished at first was very nebulous. When in seminary, those there with me also expressed their choice to enter that pathway as related to a sense of being called, chosen to serve God in some way. This sense of being called was unique and often included what role they were called for--for some it was to solo ministry, for some it was to minister to the sick or dying, for some it was to teach. Like the figures in scripture, many of us felt doubts as to our qualifications, doubts about our fitness to answer the call, doubts about our understanding of what service we were called to give. Some who entered into the study found greater clarification of an already perceived role; some found pursuing the call led them into places they did not anticipate. The gospel accounts tell us that Jesus called the Twelve, and then sent them out to call others—to be Apostles. Those who were disciples were told to make disciples-baptizing (claiming) and teaching others. In his June Newsletter to the Union congregation, Rev. Holeman wrote an article about "EVANGELISM". What he wrote has been on my mind since I read it. Because that is what we are called to be: EVANELISTS. And somehow we have often become uncomfortable with the term. It has become associated with images apart from the Biblical one of being a bearer of the good news. The purpose for which Jesus summoned the brothers from their nets was to become fishers for people; the risen Lord told Peter, to feed his sheep; the ascending Christ told the disciples to become apostles--to go to all nations, baptizing, teaching and making other disciples. What you see when you enter into our narratives of Jesus in the original language is the word **εὐαγγέλιον** which according to our translations say it is the good news: the good news of Jesus Christ the Son of God. The Greek dictionary puts it this way: **εὐαγγέλιον**, ou, τό good news; in the NT only of God's message of salvation *gospel, good news; (1) as denoting the act of proclamation *preaching of the gospel* (1st Corinthians 4.15); (2) as denoting the work of evangelization *cause, service, or spread of the gospel* (Philippians 4.3); (3) as denoting the content of the message as an offer of salvation *gospel, good news, God's message* (1st Corinthians 9.14a).* Evangelism according to the New Testament **IS** the Good News. That is what we are called to witness to; to spread, to live into. So what has happened to us and our understanding that we are called to be witnesses, bearers of this good news? Why did the statement in his newsletter that the idea of evangelism and being evangelists makes us uncomfortable speak to a truth about us? Perhaps it is because we now identify evangelism as what happens with church wide evangelism campaigns which lead to couples or groups going out to a neighborhood, going door-to-door with flyers about a particular church, or

someone standing on a "soap-box" at a busy corner shouting things at those walking by, or those billboards or "sandwich-style boards which condemn folks for certain beliefs. A certain political agenda has also become attached to the term...and often that agenda does not seem to reflect the compassion and love expressed by Jesus Christ within the scriptural accounts which are themselves termed the Gospels. Each of these suggestion may have an element of truth in them about our perceptions of evangelism and evangelists. There is also the factor that many of us assume that everyone has "heard" the good news, so we have no further obligation to be witnesses to it. But what the major problem with each of these possibilities is an underlying assumption that evangelism is about "selling" something: *your* understanding of Christianity; convincing others to believe the way *you* do so they join *your* group. The truth is that the good news of the gospels is not about us, not about our traditions or ways of worship. The good news of the Gospel is that it is about God—God's grace. The grace of God that through Jesus Christ can heal, change, and redeem our hearts. Doing evangelism then means leaving us out of it as much as possible; focusing on who God is; seeking to learn according to our Scriptures what God shown us about God's self; and learning what those Scriptures tell us about how we are to respond to God's offers of grace. How does it change your understanding of evangelism if it is directed toward carrying God outside of our group? What if the way we evangelize is by being and acting more like the one who called and sent us?

Pastor Libby