

Paul Mowry's Message, "Called" - Sunday January 29, 2014

There's a chase scene in a movie where a holy man and his bodyguard are trying to escape gunfire as they climb the side of a steep mountain. The holy man is very calm amidst all the danger.

His bodyguard asks, "How can you be so calm when they're shooting at us?" The holy man replies, "I just don't believe it is God's will that I should die on the side of this mountain." His bodyguard is reassured by this and asks, "So you really don't think it's God's plan for us to die here?" The holy man says, "I don't think it's God's plan for me to die here. I don't know about you."

I wish I knew God's plan . . . for our lives and for the world. Unfortunately, I don't know the mind of God. But what I do know is that God created us for a purpose. I am not sure who said this, but I love the quote, "there are no spare parts in the universe;" we are all necessary.

Last week's Scripture was Isaiah 49:1-7. "The LORD called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me."

When Isaiah wrote those words, Jerusalem had been destroyed and the Jews had been forced into painful exile in Babylon. I imagine at least some of those people -- ancient but no less real -- must have wondered what God's plan was for them. Or if there even was a plan.

But Isaiah tells us God "has chosen you." Yes, God is calling you. It may be hard to hear. Or we may not want to hear it. Most of the call stories in the Bible include a period of refusal:

Moses is called to free the Jews from Egypt, but protests that he can't because of his speech impediment; Jonah is called to warn the people of Nineveh, but he doesn't feel like he cares about those people; Jeremiah was called to warn against idolatry, but he told God he was too young to answer the call.

Perhaps a protest comes to your mind when you think of answering God's call for you. Good reasons why you shouldn't or can't or won't. We can be confident that God equips us with the means necessary to answer our call.

On this weekend dedicated to the memory and work of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., it's worth noting that his selection as leader of the Montgomery bus boycott was mainly because he was so new to town, and to civil rights work, that he hadn't been there long enough to make any strong friends or enemies. Some doubted it was going to be successful and so they preferred that a newcomer without a reputation take the fall. Whatever the machinations of those human minds in selecting Dr. King to lead it, clearly it was God who called him.

God sees us as bigger than we see ourselves.

"It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." (v. 6)

I don't know what your call is. But I'm confident you're being called. And I don't know how the strengths and struggles in your life fit into the plan. And I don't know if or how any fractured relationships in your family or with your friends fit into the plan. And I don't know if or how any illness or accident or chronic condition you suffer with fit into the plan.

But I know that YOU, you very specifically, fit into the plan.

Our task is to open ourselves to God's call.

One of Dr. King's mentors was the theologian, the Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman, who helped establish the Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples in San Francisco in 1944. It was one of the first racially integrated, intercultural churches in the U.S. Dr. Thurman once said, "Don't ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive and then go do that. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive."