

The Spirit's Calling Isaiah 61:1-3

Isaiah 61:1-3

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me
because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives
and release to the prisoners,
² to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor
and the day of vengeance of our God,
to comfort all who mourn,
³ to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

I am a big fan of board games. Especially Settler's of Catan. The first few times I played, though, I was terrible. The game has one goal, one mission. And that is to get 10 points before anyone else does. That's the whole game. There are lots of ways to get points – build settlements, turn those into cities, build the longest road, buy victory cards. And the first few times I played; I was always focused on building

the longest road. That was always my focus. And I missed the actual goal of the game. As everyone else was getting lots of points and settlements and cities, I was just building a longer and longer road. I missed the goal. I missed the mission. I missed the bigger picture.

That is a challenge not just in board games, but for us as followers of Christ. Just here at Bon Air Presbyterian Church, there is so much work, so much to do, so much that can take our focus. Budget, worship numbers, committee meetings. All very important. All needed for us to dive into the work of ministry. But when we don't pause and listen and pray and invite the Holy Spirit in, we can easily miss the forest for the trees. Especially us pastors.

A few weeks ago, I was having a conversation with another pastor. We were talking about ministry and calling, and the challenges of church. And as we talked about making difficult decisions in the church, he said something very interesting. He said,

"My calling is not to make sure my particular congregation or church building last forever. That's not my calling. My calling is to tell people they are loved by Christ, and then invite them into a life changing relationship with Christ. However that ends up looking."

I found that beautiful. And also, very helpful. This pastor loves his particular congregation and church. He loves the people and the ministries, and the work he is able to do there. It is a gift to him that this is his job. But he remembers his greater calling, his greater hope and dream.

When Jesus went back to his hometown of Nazareth after healing and preaching and telling people about the kingdom of God, the people of his hometown asked him to stay here. To only do miracles and wonders for them. In response, Jesus opened up this scroll from Isaiah, and read these words out loud:

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to set free those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*

This is as close as we get to Jesus sharing a mission statement. His calling. His ultimate plan. What is fascinating is that these words are not about what we might expect. They are not about creating the greatest worship services or building the largest cathedrals. There’s nothing about budgets or numbers of any sort. Instead, Jesus shares his mission, his dream is to have the poor and oppressed know good news. To release people who live in captivity and show true freedom. To help people be healed and know the fullness of abundant life. And to forgive all debts that can keep people from knowing God and knowing each other.

It was all about people. It was all about helping people know the life and love and community God always wanted us to know. Jesus knew the Holy Spirit was filling him for this kind of work.

This Sunday is Pentecost Sunday. It is the day we all are reminded and know that we are filled with the Holy Spirit. We all have great gifts. And we are all called by God to love and serve the world. There are so many gifts in this room. Gifts for teaching and guiding children and youth. Gifts for welcoming new worshipers and creating community. Gifts for proclaiming God's good news, and not just through words. Gifts of art and music. Gifts of service and justice. Gifts of cooking and baking. Gifts of tending gardens and repairing buildings. Gifts of prayer and cards and shawls knit with love.

I hope this day you know that you are filled with the Holy Spirit and have gifts from God. And that you also are called by God.

This day, I want to invite you to think about what your own personal calling looks like. What gifts has God given you? What is your hope for this world?