**Topic**: **Vocation**

**Expert**:

**Testimony**: struggle of balance?

**OT Reading**: Exodus 19 /Isaiah 61

**NT Readings**: 1 Peter 2 / Philippians 3:13 / Revelation 10:9-11 / Ephesians 4 / Romans 12

**Gospel**: Matthew 16:18

Calling all Calls

 Hello and welcome back to school. Let’s start off with a recollection exercise: I want you to pretend you had to introduce yourself in a large group setting. How would you do it? If you’re like most you start with your name, then you tell a little about yourself, Maybe your family, maybe your job, maybe why you’re here in this place having to awkwardly introduce yourself, maybe your hobbies or favorite sports team and if your super funny and outgoing you always state your favorite color. Very rarely, if ever, have I heard someone start by saying, “I am an heir to the kingdom of heaven. A child of God. I am fearfully and wonderfully made. I am part of the royal priesthood. I am the salt of the earth, a new creation in Christ.” Or 1000 other descriptions God has called us. Instead we start with the name our parents gave us, and the things that we have done. We tend to identify ourselves by what we have done. In this lesson we are going to be looking at the unique identity or call that God has graciously given each one of us.

 We all have the desire to make a difference and sometimes wonder why we’re here or what is our purpose. According to Os Guiness, author of the book The Call, our culture answers these questions in 3 general ways.

First we “constrain” ourselves. We categorize people into groups and limit our options, we label people as baby boomers, generation X, etc… if we can classify ourselves then we can find strength in numbers and be safe and comfortable.

The second view is to have the “courage to be”. Life has no meaning, so it’s up to you to forge ahead and invent yourself. Have courage to define who you want to be. I once met someone who was describing to me how they live and how they find purpose. Life has 3 stages, first you are to let the wind blow you where it would, you must experience life and all that it has to offer. There are no rules, no constraints, complete freedom with no regret. The next stage comes when you have experienced life. You have seen the world, you must decide what is good and right, what to do and how to live. The final stage is when you dedicate yourself to something greater then yourself, a religion, a cause, a meaning. The progression is all about you finding yourself, finding purpose, making a life that satisfies yourself.

 The third view is the “constituted view” where you must realize who you were destined to be, often called the “acorn theory” and only in recognizing your destiny, will you become the Oak Tree you were meant to be. The only way to be happy is when you realize that your life story and then live it out.

Guiness contrasts these views with the Christian view. We are not constrained but called by God in person. We can’t courageously raise ourselves up without calling on God’s help and we shouldn’t look backwards to determine who we are, but look forward as we follow God’s lead. (*forgetting the past, looking ahead… question for small group*). The Christian has been blessed to receive the answer to life’s questions because we are reliant on the revelation given to us in Jesus Christ. The challenge that we are faced with is how do I balance being called a child of God and the other responsibilities in my life, like my job, family, friend, etc…

 [**Expert Witness-]**

      Perhaps you have heard of a teaching in the church called the priesthood of believers. A simple summary of this teaching is that all believers from the youngest child in Sunday school to the greatest saint who ever lived, all believers are priests. That is to say, we are all equal in the sight of God, and we have a ministry to perform. This is not an idea that originated with a person, it originated with God and can be found in the old and new testament alike.

In the Old Testament a certain group of people were set aside to be Priests. They had specific duties, specific clothes, and were the only ones who could enter into the Holy of Holies and approach God, one-on-one. But God did not limit himself or his people to having this structure forever. In fact in the book of Exodus when the priestly class was being designated, God instructed Moses to tell the Hebrew people: “although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and holy nation” (Exodus 19.5-6) and again in Isaiah 61, God tells the Israelites “you will be called priests of the Lord and you will be named ministers of our God. This was foreshadowing of the day when all believers will be priests.

In Matthew Jesus tells Peter that he is the rock that he will build his church upon him. This may sound like Peter was to be the new priest and it would be for him and maybe also the other disciples, but look at what Peter goes onto call the people of God, all the believers: (1 Peter 2:5), you yourselves, as living stones, are built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood and again in verse 9, But you are *a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own*, so that you may *proclaim the virtues* of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

 Peter understood the priesthood of all believers. He understood that we all have equal access to God and we are all called to ministry. Within this priesthood we are all equal, and we also have responsibilities. Likewise, the apostle Paul understood this when he writes that some have been called to be prophets, teachers, administrators, healers, etc…or again when he states what is your gift if it is to lead, lead, encourage then encourage, give, give generously…

The priesthood of all believers to us, simply means that we are called to be God’s first, and then we are to look to the responsibilities God has given to us here on earth. Only when we understand that first and foremost, we are called to be a Child of God, and everything else second, will we be the priest God desires for us to be. As a child of God our first call is to put God first in our life. We are not to find a place for God or carve in some God time, or try to squeeze him in, we need to put him first. We need to order our lives around his word, around prayer, around worship, around doing the work of sharing his love. When God is not at the forefront of our lives, our thoughts, our words, everything begins to fall apart and we cannot successfully complete our other callings. How can I do my job if I only rely on myself? How can I raise my children if I am not letting my heavenly father raise me? How can I be a friend if I am ignoring Jesus? How can I love my spouse if I am ignoring God’s love?

**[TESTIMONY]**

When we find our identity in Christ, we can start to properly fulfill the calling he has placed on us. God desires us to be successful and has promised to be with us always, to work for good in our lives, and to continue the work he started in us in our baptism. But too often we let the distractions of our lives or the secondary callings of our lives take priority. It’s not easy. There is way too much stuff to do. Our lives are filled with busyness, with work, with stress, with anxiety, with picking up the kids from soccer, with planning the next party, with too many bills, too many problems, and the list can go on and on. We start to look at life and all the woulda’s, coulda’s, and shoulda’s and we try to white knuckle and bear the burden of life on our own. Perhaps the moments of this life group, can become a time when you start to look at life, not as some dragon you’ve got to slay, but instead to look at your life as the place where you walk with God and everything starts to come together. When we start with Christ when we allow the Holy Spirit to guide our lives being a husband or a wife or a friend, or a boss or an employee doesn’t become easier, instead the way we view those roles of our life find purpose and new meaning in Christ. Seek first the Kingdom of God and all these things will be granted unto you, takes on a refreshing meaning. That is the life that we should be seeking. The life that finds its identity and purpose first in Christ, and then in the other areas of life.

 Lastly, remember you are not growing in faith to hide from the world, to gain some secret knowledge and be one of the super holy people, instead you grow so that you can be the spearhead of God’s movement in the world today. (*Revelation where John spits up the gospel because it doesn’t stay in his stomach*) You prepare yourself to go out and do battle. You are the bridge between sanctuary and street, whether in work, church, family, or school you are the body of Christ sent into the world to share God’s love. You have a life to start living and a calling to follow.