

McCabe United Methodist Church

April 15, 2018

Vocation: Living God's Call series

Letting Your Life Speak

Sermon on John 20:1-18 & 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

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Occasionally, over the last 20 years, or so, I have thought about what kind of tattoo I would get – if I ever felt a strong and sincere desire to get a tattoo. Though I have absolutely no problem with other people having tattoos, I'm not sure tattoos are really *me*, so I kind of doubt that I'd ever actually get one. Regardless, I have still wondered what tattoo I would get if I ever *did* get one.

My tattoo would have to tell a story about who I am...about who God created me to be...a design that was uniquely *me*, but something that wasn't obvious to others upon first glance. And about 4 years ago, I decided that, if I were to ever get a tattoo, it would be something related to Mary Magdalene.

In each of the Bible's four Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – there is a story about the first Easter morning. Interestingly enough, from Gospel to Gospel, the details of the Easter story vary. The main point that Jesus has risen from the dead, and that he is *not* in the tomb, remains consistent in each story...but, other details differ.

One of the very noticeable ways the Easter story's details differ from Gospel to Gospel, is in just who initially went to the tomb early that Sunday morning. Each Gospel reports that it was *women* who went – but *which* women, and how *many* there were, varies.

According to the Gospel of Matthew, *two* women went to the tomb the first Easter morning. According to Mark, *three* women went to the tomb. In Luke, it was at least *five* women who went to the tomb...and, in John, it was just *one* woman who went.

The consistent figure in each version of the Easter story is Mary Magdalene. Whether or not anyone else was with her when she went to Jesus' tomb that first Easter morning some 2,000 years ago, *she* was there. *She* saw the stone that had been rolled away. *She* was told to “go and tell” the male disciples that Jesus had been raised from the dead.

Because of Mary Magdalene's clear presence at the empty tomb, and because she was clearly told to “go and tell”, she is the patron saint of women preachers everywhere. And she is most certainly the patron saint of *this* woman preacher. I *love* Mary Magdalene. According to Gospel accounts, Jesus cast out seven demons from her. She had been healed by Jesus in a powerful way: her life was

never the same after that and she was profoundly grateful to him. He was her healer, her teacher, and her Lord.

Through Mary's story, I and other Christian women have come to understand the many and varied ways Jesus has brought *us* healing and wholeness. Those of us called by God to *preach* the Gospel hold Mary close. We women preachers revere her as the first person who was given instructions to tell others about the Easter miracle.

So...I decided my tattoo would be something related to Mary Magdalene. But, my as-yet-nonexistent tattoo will not be very big, so the design can't actually *be* Mary Magdalene herself.

But, if you do a Google image search of "Saint Mary Magdalene", many images will emerge like those on the screen(s) – images in the style of Eastern Orthodox religious art. And, in most of those images, Mary Magdalene is depicted as holding either a jar, or an egg, or both.

The jar she holds represents the oil and spices she brought with her to the tomb the first Easter morning – oil and spices she planned to use to anoint Jesus' body, a traditional act of honor performed by loved ones on the bodies of those who had died. As a symbol, the jar represents *death*.

The egg Mary holds represents the empty tomb she discovered when she arrived in the garden. That said, there is a legend in Orthodox Christianity that, along with the burial oil and spices, Mary Magdalene also had with her boiled eggs...and, as this legend goes, when Mary saw the risen Jesus, the eggs miraculously turned bright red. So, as a symbol, the egg represents *resurrection*.

The jar and the egg: death and resurrection. Good Friday and Easter Sunday. The ultimate message of our Christian faith: that death is not God's final answer for us...that God brings new life out of the most hopeless situations.

Personally, I am prone to melancholy – I always have been. As the years of my life have gone by, I find that I cling ever more tightly to the Easter message of hope in the midst of despair. I love Mary Magdalene for that reason as well...because she personifies *faith that keeps going* even when your world seems grim.

She thought Jesus was the gardener when she encountered him at the garden tomb that first Easter morning, "Sir," she said to him, "if you have carried away my Lord, tell me where you have laid him and I will take him away." But then he called her name...and she knew it was Jesus. "Mary!" he called.

He told her to tell the other disciples about his resurrection. Mere minutes later, Mary preached the first Easter sermon when she found the disciples and cried out to them, "I have seen the Lord!"

I *love* Mary Magdalene. And, so, if ever I were to get a tattoo, it would be on the inside of my left arm, near my elbow, and it would be a jar of oil with a red egg behind it.

In honor of Mary Magdalene, the first person to preach the Gospel message... Mary Magdalene, the one to whom the risen Lord Jesus called near the garden tomb that first Easter Sunday.

Last week, we began a four-week sermon series called *Vocation: Living God's Call*. The idea of God *calling to us* is what this sermon series is all about. It's what the idea of *vocation* is all about. See, the word "vocation" comes from the Latin word *vocare*, which means "to call".

As people of faith, we believe God *calls* to us – sometimes in very particular ways, like the risen Christ called to Mary Magdalene near the garden tomb...and sometimes God calls to us through the gifts and talents we've been given. How we put those God-given gifts and talents to work in this world is our *vocation*.

Pastor and writer Frederick Buechner's definition of *vocation* is often quoted in Christian circles. He said that "vocation is the place where your deep gladness meets the world's deep need."¹

The day before I was ordained back in June of 2006, a clergy mentor of mine gave me a book about vocation. The book is called *Let Your Life Speak* and it's by a writer and teacher named Parker Palmer. Early in the book *Let Your Life Speak*, Palmer quotes Frederick Buechner's definition of *vocation*...and then he expounds upon it, saying:

"Buechner's definition [of vocation] starts with the self and moves toward the needs of the world: it begins, wisely, where vocation begins – not in what the world needs (which is everything), but in the nature of the human self, in what brings the self joy, the deep joy of knowing that we are here on earth to be the gifts that God created."² Hear and read that quote again:

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¹ Quoted in Parker Palmer's book *Let Your Life Speak*. 16.

² *Let Your Life Speak*. 16-17.

Isn't that lovely? I mean, isn't it lovely to think that God created each of us to be a particular kind of gift in and for this world? We know we have found our vocation in those moments of life when we are doing the things we know God created us to do.

In those moments, we feel fully alive, at peace. Even if what we're doing is challenging, there is an exhilaration that emerges in our spirit when we do the things God created us – that God built us – to do. This is especially true when those things help to bring life, beauty, meaning, hope, and healing to our world.

I love in Dave Hagler's testimony about theatre that he realized early in life he was *not* a musician, and he was *not* a handyman...but he discovered that he *did* have gifts and talents for public speaking...and, upon seeing a production of *Our Town* when he was very young, he *knew* he wanted to do that: to be on stage, to help tell a story that would bring meaning to the lives of others.

I also love that Dave made it clear his love of theatre did not become his actual profession, per se. I think he would call it more of a hobby – some would call it an *avocation* – but, he also pointed out that he uses his public speaking skills in his trial work as an attorney. And, of course, God has used his theatrical vocation in powerful ways through McCabe.

A person's vocation does not necessarily end up being the work they get paid to do. While many of us would consider our paid work a *calling from God*, others consider their paid work the work that needs doing to put food on the table...and, hopefully, their vocation is lived-out in other ways: through parenting, through hobbies, through volunteer work.

Again, according to Parker Palmer, *vocation* is being the gift God put you on this earth to be. (Whether you're getting paid for it or not!)

Like Dave Hagler, I, too, discovered at a young age a knack for – and an interest in – public speaking. For many years of my younger life, I lived out that interest through the children's community theatre in my hometown of Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

I had bit parts when I started doing plays in 2nd or 3rd grade, but, after a couple of years, the parts grew.

On the left side of the screen, here, you see me as the sheep in *Charlotte's Web*. I think I was 9- or 10-years-old here and I remember vividly being so thrilled when we got our scripts and I discovered that I had 21 lines: *twenty-one lines!!!*

On the right side of the screen is me as Auntie Em in a Missoula Children's Theatre version of *The Wizard of Oz*. I think I was in 7th grade there. I absolutely loved being

on stage, helping to tell a story that delighted audiences...and perhaps even brought some meaning to life.

Early in his book *Let Your Life Speak*, Parker Palmer makes the point that our vocation lies in remembering what we loved to do before other people – and the world – started telling us what we *should* be doing.

When I first read Palmer's book over a decade ago, I remember asking my mom what I really loved doing when I was a kid. Her answer came pretty quickly: "Well, Jen," she said, "you loved being in plays and you loved your church activities." (At the same time I was involved in community theatre, I also participated in many music-related programs at my home church.)

It's really no wonder, then, that soon after graduating high school, I sensed God calling me into pastoral ministry...a vocation that regularly allows me the privilege of quote-unquote "performing" as a preacher and worship leader, helping to draw people into the life-changing story of Jesus Christ.

Of course, there are many other things I love about pastoral ministry, but it makes so much sense that things I loved doing as a child are, in many ways, are part of the profession God called me into in adulthood.

Now. As I said a bit ago, not everyone's vocation is a perfect match for their paid profession. And there are many who have perhaps never really considered whether their paid profession is a *vocation* – a calling from God.

Whatever the case may be, I hope and pray that some aspect of your life has you putting your God-given skills and talents to work to bring beauty, to bring love, to bring hope and healing to others and to the world. Because, when you put your God-given skills and talents to work bringing beauty, love, hope, and healing to the world, you are living God's call...you are living into your vocation...you are letting your life speak...you are *being the gift God made you to be*.

Let us pray...

God of Easter, like Mary at the garden tomb, you call each of our names, in many ways, throughout our lives. We are so grateful that you made each of us unique, with different skills and talents to put to work for good in this world. Where we may be struggling to find our vocation, help us to hear you call our names...help us to sense the purposes you have put us on this earth to help fulfill. And where we found ways to live your calling, may we be ever grateful; in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.