

McCabe United Methodist Church

April 8, 2018

Vocation: Living God's Call: Remodeling & Rebuilding

Isaiah 43:1-5 & 1 Corinthians 12:1-7

Pastor Mark Ehrmantraut

Video Testimony – Chris Chase, Celebrate Recovery Ministry Leader

Chris has a powerful testimony. His story highlights the life-changing difference Jesus Christ can make in our lives. In many ways, Chris' testimony is a perfect way to start off our April series on Vocation. We're talking about finding God's purpose in our lives, and living it out.

Let's Pray...

God of Might and God of Mercy, may the words of my mouth and may the meditations on each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. You are our Rock. You are our Redeemer. Amen.

In worship during April, we're talking about vocation. We're talking about our call stories. God's purpose for our lives. Over the next two weeks Pastor Jenny will share her call story. I'll share part of mine in a few moments, but first, Chris, from the video, is the ministry leader of McCabe's Celebrate Recovery ministry. In 'real life' Chris owns a construction company. Chris is a successful builder and remodeler of homes. And in recent years Chris has discovered his true calling. Chris has discovered that his God-given purpose is remodeling and building. It's just that Chris has discovered his mission is helping people build and remodel their lives.

Chris has a calling from God to help people discover Jesus, to help people meet Jesus so others can find hope and healing so others can find their God-given purpose in life too.

Building and remodeling... Discovering and living God's purpose in life.

God, through the Apostle Paul, had something to say about this in 1st Corinthians 12. The Apostle Paul wrote that we each come with different toolboxes. We each have different tools and experiences. We are each builders and remodelers in God's Kingdom.

The Apostle Paul wrote: *Now concerning spiritual gifts brothers and sisters, I don't want you to be uninformed. I want you to know you have gifts. I want you to know your purpose.*

God's Spirit is woven right into the fabric of our lives. It can seem complex. It can even be misunderstood, but it's important. We have to pay attention. Because if we don't, if we don't use what God has given us to help build and remodel... we'll start to drift. We can get unsettled.

There are a lot of different home remodeling shows on TV. Sometimes Brenda (my wife) and I laugh. We've bought a fair number of houses over the years, and even before we knew about HGTV, we imagine we must've been dream clients for real estate agents. We used to walk into houses and we didn't find the faults. We saw the POTENTIAL in the house. We could always imagine buying the house and remodeling it to bring out its full potential. In many ways, that's how it was with Jesus. In many ways, that's still how it is in our own lives.

When Jesus was with people, he didn't dwell on the brokenness or the shortcomings. Jesus looked at people and saw hope and potential. As followers of Jesus, that's how God calls to us too, isn't it? We're supposed to help people discover and see their potential. We're supposed to combine our potential with others so we can make a difference.

Friends we are ongoing building and remodeling projects and we all have the potential to make a difference.

When I was in high school, and even more so in college, my life travelled certain paths. We got married. We remodeled and built our relationship together and we lived out God's purpose for us in new ways.

When I worked in the schools, I got to spend a lot of time with a lot of different people. We had a lot of cool things going on to help people. During that time, I was happy to fire up the saw or to swing a hammer. I was happy to knock down a wall or to build a deck, but over time, God's purpose for me changed. Over time, God started saying to me, your preparation and purpose are done here. It's time to invest and remodel and build something new.

But I didn't think I wanted to invest in a new building and remodeling project. I had to spend some real time wrestling with God. Change isn't always easy is it? Investing in new or different ways can feel risky. But it finally started to sink in. It's not MY will. Instead, may THY will be done.

I had to quit running and trying to hide from God. I had to learn to appreciate that the 20 years or so in education weren't wasted. God had used me during these times, AND, God was also preparing me for the years ahead. God led me to this building and remodeling phase. These projects are different for each of us. For me, it was a call to pastoral ministry.

The Apostle Paul cautions that we can get led astray by idols that can't speak. Therefore he says: I want you to understand that when we're building and remodeling for Jesus, we confess **Jesus is Lord**. We submit to the power of the Spirit as the lead designer and builder.

1 Corinthians 12 says there are many types of gifts, but we use them all in the same Spirit; there are different ways to serve, but the same Lord; There are different activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. We're all different, yet we're all in this together. We're all different, yet God has given each of us what we need to make a difference. I don't know about you, but to me, it seems building and remodeling takes grit, and guts, and it takes some grace. At times, it can be smooth and easy sailing. At other times it can feel like it's pounding and scraping and ripping us apart.

I've wrestled with whether or not I was going to share this, but I tend to be pretty candid. So if I'm being fully candid, I never really wanted to be a pastor. Yet I eventually learned that it's not always up to me. God placed a call on my life. God has said to me, right now, your *vocation* is in pastoral ministry. That's my purpose and mission right now. I also learned that I will be restless. I will not be content if I try to run away from it or ignore it. I know, because at first, I tried to run away and avoid it. I have to tell you, when I finally gave in. When I finally relented and accepted God's invitation to begin a major remodeling project on my life, right before I submitted to God I gave one major, one last ditch attempt to try to run and avoid God's remodeling in my life.

I quit my job in education. We uprooted and moved our family to Michigan. I went to Michigan State instead of seminary. Things should have been great there. I had great classes, great research, and great funding. But at Christmas break, Brenda and I sat down and I said: I don't think this is where I'm supposed to be. Brenda just said: I Know...

So I started the building and remodeling process in a new way. I took those first conscious steps toward pastoral ministry. I called my parents and told them. I'm not sure, but as much as you can tell through the phone, I think my mom may have shed a tear as she said: I knew it.

My brother on the other hand didn't even try to hide his SHOCK. He was dumbfounded. He knew me. He'd grown up with me. He asked: WHAT!?! Are you even qualified for that?

I don't know who said it, but I'm living proof that God doesn't call the qualified. I'm trying to trust that God qualifies the called. You've probably heard it before, whether it's you or me, I draw strength knowing that: God doesn't call people who have it all together and have everything they think they need. Instead, God calls us saying: Come as you are. Come as you are and I'll give you what you need.

One other call I made during that time was to Pastor Debra. Pastor Debra was the only person I knew at the time in Conference leadership in the United Methodist Church here in the Dakotas. When I called Pastor Debra to say that I thought it was time to give God full and complete access to this building and remodeling project that I am, Pastor Debra kind of chuckled on the phone. It was

a little unnerving. Maybe it would be like knocking down a wall in the house **THEN** finding out that it was a load bearing wall. Pastor Debra chuckled. I thought, great. I've just laid my heart out over the phone, and she's laughing at me.

But then she added, "Mark, your name has been in my Bible. It's been tucked in this passage from Isaiah for about 2 years now. I've been praying for you every week with this Scripture from Isaiah 43 where God says: "Do not fear. I have redeemed you. I have called **YOU** by name. You are mine. I will be with you through the fires and floods. I will not let them overwhelm you. I will not let the flames consume you for I am the Lord your God. I am the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. You are precious in my sight and I love you"

Sometimes we're still amazed at the work God has, and is, doing in our lives. I know I'm still fully and completely a work in progress. We also know that our lives continue to unfold right here in Bismarck. Our lives are unfolding together with you as we're trying to allow God to work on us, and through us, as we're trying to serve Jesus Christ with you through McCabe.

I still don't fully understand what the end product will look like. But I do know... I do know PERSONALLY that God uses very ordinary people to help build and strengthen the Kingdom. God the Designer and Builder... God the Remodeler and the Giver of Purpose... God has called YOU by name...

*"Do not fear. I have redeemed you. I have called **YOU** by name. You are mine. I will be with you through the fires and floods. I will not let them overwhelm you. I will not let the flames consume you for I am the Lord your God. I am the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. You are precious in my sight and I love you."* God has a purpose for you and for me. What does this look like in your life?

Let's pray:

Holy God, we praise you because you are God. You are our protection and our strength. When we're between a rock and hard place, we don't need to be afraid. Even when we build walls to try to keep you out. Even when we turn away from you. Even when we try to block out your calling to us, you pursue us. Heal us. Cleanse us. Wash us clean.

May we have the strength, and the courage, to listen and to act. May we have the wisdom to allow you to use us, to allow you to help us live into the purpose for which you created us. You have called us by name (dear God). And here we are. We offer ourselves and our lives completely and wholly to you.

We pray this in the name of your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.