

**SERMON:** *“Do whatever he tells you.”*

Rev. Geoff Ross, Sunday, January 16, 2022, St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church

To be honest, today’s John reading feels out of sync from LW’s Luke reading in that Jesus has already called the disciples – but it does echo Matthew’s/Mark’s/Luke’s account of the “temptation of Jesus” that comes immediately after His baptism. How? It has to do with the difference between our understanding of “our” God-given gifts/abilities/powers, and God’s. Together, these texts highlight the idea of vocation/calling/ occupation/ability – and gifts as something given to enable us to abundantly live out our created calling. But, despite the fact that God freely offers us every thing/gift/ability/advantage we need – and all we have to do is to listen/acknowledge/respond to God’s gifts as an offer to grow/live in/enjoy God’s extravagant joy/love/grace – we don’t, choosing instead to go our own way/make our own beds....(Ps 36:4)

*[“Call/Calling”:Old Norse/English: “kalla” – to “cry out to”/“summon loudly”/powerfully/persuasively/command to go/do/serve – a “mission”/“mission” – sent out/toward a way of life/vocation/career. This understanding is external/comes from another – directed toward us:it’s a directive/command/purpose/gift we’re given to fulfill in response to an external/communal goal. This is God’s intent, but we misuse “Call/Calling” as an innate/inherent/intrinsic talent/skill/aptitude that comes from within us/is self-developed/our natural abilities to be used to serve our own ends.]*

The Isaiah reading highlights the gulf between us and God’s grand/noble/exalted/glorious intentions for His people/us. God’s message is one of hope/redemption/restoration that is meant to be aspirational/encouraging/expectant: God’s plan/purpose for us is grand/majestic, fit to match our created potential. Through Isaiah, God speaks of “vindication”/“glory”/ a “new name”/ becoming a “crown”/“royal diadem” in God’s hand – that they/we shall no longer be “termed/called ‘Forsaken.’” It’s clear that God’s vision/plan is for God’s People/us/you/me is for a future as a light to the nations/world. But, meant to be inspiring/reassuring;God’s vision is greater than our own. God’s possibilities dwarf our grandest plans/schemes. Sadly, Isaiah’s words lay bare our small-minded/short-sighted/limited imaginations.

*[Psalm/Psalmist:sings/speaks of/echoes God’s great/gracious/righteous/faithful love/protection/provision – all unmerited gifts from a loving God whose providence lifts him/us from despair to joy. Lifted up/saved, he is now compelled/called to proclaim the abundance of God’s steadfast love/ways – not just for him but for all “those who know God.”]*

Read this way, Paul's writing/teaching on spiritual gifts provides the lens to read the other three: That God's gifts/offerings to us – each "*manifestation of the Spirit*" – are given not for our own/personal/selfish purposes, but "*for the common good.*" (1 Cor 12:7) To Paul, spiritual gifts/abilities are not given to us for our individual enjoyment/accomplishment/pride, but are given so that the whole community might be strengthened/built up/enjoy God's abundance. To drive this home, Paul clearly defines these "*gifts*"/"*services*"/"*activities*" as coming/deriving from the Trinity: The gifts/given by the Spirit, services/rendered(offered) to the Lord, activities activated by God. These gifts are things to be done/acted on/out, not to be possessed/kept/hidden away: they are given to be used in the coming together of God/human to accomplish God's plan/purpose/will.

[*"Gift/s": definition... Something given now owned by the receiver – implies a 1-time exchange. Earthly view/all about possession/ownership/what's-mine-is-mine – Gollum-like: defend/kill to protect it/our "precious!" Similar/corrupted view Call/Calling: believe "SGs" defining traits/ours/what make us us – commodities to be used/exploited.... But they're not!*]

Often described as the only 'unnecessary' miracle in that there was no 'need' for it, the story of Jesus' wine-miracle at a wedding in Cana actually does reveal an essential/underlying truth – our undeniable/fundamental/practical 'need' of a sign of God's extravagant provision/protection/grace. Despite Mary's seemingly impulsive/unexpected/selfish – (an abuse of power?) – demand that Jesus perform a 'parlour trick,' Jesus uses the moment to show the difference between our misuse of God's gifts and how He/God wants them to be used. In this simple act Jesus first revealed the extravagant abundance of God amidst the scarcity/need/greed of this world: Withholding nothing, Jesus fills the jars to the brim! But, more importantly, echoing the prophetic promises of a heavenly/Messianic banquet with abundant food and "good wine," Jesus' "good wine" is a sign that, in/through Him/His arrival/coming to be-with us, the promised future/foretold coming of God's kingdom/planned redemption/restoration of this world/God's people has started. Quietly, John then tells us that by doing this act, Jesus "*revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.*" (John 2:11) Friends, as we enter into a New Year/Epiphany/whatever the future holds, let us also believe in Him/do what He tells you/me/us to do – and be servants of His/God's abundance in/to a world in need. Amen.