

Repurposed

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Community Presbyterian Church - Rochester, Minnesota

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany - February 6, 2022

Texts: Isaiah 6:1-8, 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, Psalm 138; Luke 5:1-11

RESPONSIVE READING Psalm 138

I give you thanks, Beloved, with my whole heart;

I do not praise you only in secret, but before all people.

I bow in thanks for your steadfast love and faithfulness;

for your name and your word cover me like a canopy.

On the day I called, you answered me,

you increased the strength of my soul.

Though you are lofty, you turn your face to the lowly;

the proud cannot escape your gaze.

Though I walk in the midst of trouble,

you preserve me from danger, and deliver me.

You will fulfill your purpose for me;

your steadfast love endures forever.

Never forsake this one you have made.

GOSPEL READING Luke 5.1-11

After escaping the anger of his hometown, Jesus ranged through the Galilean countryside, teaching and healing. People clung to him, urging him to stay with them, but he followed the Spirit onward and began to call and gather his disciples.

Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret (also known as the Sea of Galilee), and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him. Holy wisdom, holy word. Thanks be to God.

At our house, we don't like to discard anything that's still useful. We recycle what we can, and try to keep things going past their expected life span. Like the old saying: "Use it up, wear it out, make it do or do without." That's why Bob drives a 1995 pickup and, for fun, a 1968 MG. He's brought them both back to life and renewed their original purpose any number of times. I also love things that are *repurposed*, given a new life and a new meaning. Here's my favorite: a cross pendant I got long ago. I was drawn to it because of the irregular shape of the folded metal, its delicate spaces. Pure silver, it had a heft in my hand. It spoke to me of beauty forged in suffering. And it's one of a kind. It was made from an old silver spoon. Turn it over and you can see the handle of the original spoon, and the word "sterling." Repurposed, for sure! I was even more taken with it when I learned that the maker was a retired dentist who used his old dentistry tools to remake things like this. His own life, too, had been repurposed.

Today's texts are all about purpose and repurposing. In Luke 5, Jesus is still at the beginning of his ministry, finding his way. He's going from village to village, teaching mostly in synagogues, mostly on sabbath days. Itinerant preachers and miracle workers were a dime a dozen those days; at first, he's nothing special. And then, suddenly, he is. One day after synagogue, he goes to a man's home and finds the wife's mother sick in bed. He heals her. A true miracle! The man's name is Simon. Jesus starts ranging farther afield. People beg him to stay in one place, to be their personal holy man; but he senses that his purpose goes beyond one locality. He tells them, "I have to go and speak the good news to other cities, too; for I was sent for this purpose."



Now he's out by the Sea of Galilee and he's hooked a crowd so large and eager he's in danger of being trampled. He spots the man Simon, the one with the sick mother-in-law, on the shore there, minding his own business, cleaning his fishnets after a fruitless night's work. Jesus just hops into his boat and tells him to row out on the water. From there, his voice will carry and people can listen without shoving. Simon obeys. When he's finished his message, Jesus tells Simon to cast his nets down into deep water.

Now why would a professional fisherman who knows the lake like the back of his hand - why would he listen to this *carpenter* from an inland town who probably never caught a fish in his life? Is it the healing Simon had seen with his own eyes in his own home? Or is it something in Jesus' eyes that look into the deep places of Simon's soul and say, "Trust me"? He did trust. If the crowd is thick on the shore, the fish come even thicker: so many they're breaking the nets, sinking the boats.



Simon sort of folds up then in front of Jesus, and what he says is surprising: “Get away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.” Of course, Jesus doesn't leave. He does something completely different. He gives Simon a new name: Peter. Only at this point in Luke's story do we hear it - and we say, “Ah. This must be *the* Peter. The *disciple* Peter.” With a look, a command, and a new name, Jesus repurposes the career fisherman as a faithful follower. He gives him a wilder, more significant life. As we heard earlier, God doesn't call those who are prepared; God prepares those who are called.

In today's other stories, we hear echoes of Simon Peter's response to God's call: Isaiah, who was probably a priest in Israel, and therefore in the king's pocket, goes to the temple and is stunned to witness the glory of the living God. He cries, “I am lost! I am a man of unclean lips, in a people of unclean lips!” And yet when God asks, “Whom shall I send?” he answers, “Here I am. Send me.” His life is remolded, repurposed.

Saul, on the road to Damascus, was knocked off his horse and struck blind by the light of the risen Christ. He later says, “I am unworthy to be called an apostle. I persecuted the church of God. But by God's grace, I am what I am.” Saul is renamed Paul, the greatest missionary the world has ever known, author of a big chunk of our Bible. Repurposed, for life. For the life of God's world.

Simon Peter, the fisherman turned follower; Isaiah, the priest turned prophet; Paul, the bully turned believer. Three lives transformed according to God's purpose. All three miracles can be expressed in the trust of the psalmist: “*You will fulfill your purpose for me.*”

Think about your own life. How often has God repurposed you? Transformed your life? More than once, I'll bet. God has a way of preparing us for purposes beyond our knowing.

Like most people who have lived long, Margaret has learned what it means to be repurposed. I love the way she takes each change in stride, even now, when striding is no longer an option. She recently sent us this letter of thanks (also printed in the newsletter): “Dear friends, Perhaps you know that the church has a wheelchair that they loan to people at times. I have been using that wheelchair until I could get one of my own. It's been useful and fun to ride around in, now that my legs are no longer strong enough to hold me up. The wheelchair worked just fine. Thank you very much for letting me use it. Now I've returned it so perhaps someone else who has a temporary need can use it. A physical therapist is coming from the Cities later this week to give me lessons so I can be a better driver. I've enjoyed being able to attend the church and Bible Study online and able to feel a part of the group. Love, Margaret”

Like others who have been repurposed many times throughout their long lives, Margaret reminds me of my cross: as silver is refined by fire, she has been tested and tried and come out as the

sterling character she is. As my cross was first an ordinary, useful spoon, the strengths of our youth are practical, useful. But the silver spoon was melted and twisted into something less obviously useful, yet of wilder beauty and deeper significance: a cross. The depth and meaning of our souls are revealed through time and love and loss and God's purpose at work in us.

Our purpose changes over the years. Even our appearance changes. We bear on our faces, in our bodies, the marks of life's crucible, the impression of the smith's hammer. Paul the persecutor turned apostle wrote, "all we with unveiled faces, beholding God's glory, are being transformed into the same image" - changed by God's glory into glory (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Are we prepared to do what God is calling us to next? What the Bible tells us over and over again is that if we ever think we can do it on our own, we're fools and possibly dangerous fools at that. But God never discards anyone, never throws a single soul away. And when Christ's gaze locks on yours and his eyes of love pierce to the depths of your soul, and he says, "Trust me," and you trust, you are repurposed for the good of the world. Shine the light that is in you. If you do, rest assured: God's purpose for you will be fulfilled. Amen.



Prayers

Take a moment in silence to ponder how God has repurposed your life, and continues to repurpose you now.....

God of love, Jesus has called us to join him as fishers of people: to include all in the wide net of your love. Send us with your love, with courage that overcomes our doubt, grace that heals our shame, and faith that opens our eyes to your miracles, so that we may love freely and deeply, in the name and the company of Jesus.

Though we are perplexed by churning events we cannot control or understand, help us trust that you will fulfill your purpose for us, and by doing so, you will also fulfill your purpose for the world. May we see your glory also shining through those who have trusted you enough to follow through difficult circumstances, whether they work in health care, politics, education, transportation, sanitation or simply sit at home and pray for the rest. All have a noble place in your economy.

We lift up those especially in need of tenderness and healing, and those who mourn. May they be comforted. Remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray, Our Father and Mother,