

Sermon: Coming to Life**Scripture: Acts 2:1-11****Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans****Date: May 31st, 2009**

“A man has found his vocation,” Thomas Merton says, “when he stops thinking about how to live and begins to live.” Thomas Merton is not saying – don’t THINK about how to live but Just Do It, like the Nike commercial, nor is he echoing the more pop spirituality sentiment of just be present to the moment and really live, but rather he is saying that the indication within ourselves that we have come upon our true vocation and calling in life is when all the angst and struggle about who am I and where am I going and how do I live the best life, when all that finally ceases and we find ourselves actually living fully and freely within that place where we belong. Our questioning – Who am I? Where do I belong? Am I living fully? What is true to me? Where is my joy? – are indicators that we are not living out our calling, our vocation. And that’s ok because it means that we are in process, our lives are still on the way to becoming. But where we can get off track from our becoming is on one side when we come to believe that these are just eternal questions that don’t have answers but that we will always have to live with them. When we doubt that there really is some external reality calling me to a place where I belong. Or on the other side, we get off track lose spiritual health when we abort the whole process and decide that its easier or safer or more convenient not to even ask the questions. It was Socrates, right, who said “the unexamined life is not worth living.”

The path that we must travel, instead, is to ponder the questions about who we are, where we are, what we are doing, where we are going, what is my passion and joy, with the understanding that there really is a way that leads to life for us and another way that leads to death (so there you go Tim. Tim said that if we were going to do a Sunday of shape-note singing then I would not be able to avoid the subject of death in my sermon since that’s the primary theme of most shape-note hymns – death). There is a way for each of us that is the path of death in our lives, that literally will kill us but more commonly will lead us to just middle of the road, getting’ by, “eh why not” sort of living. And then there is a way particular to each of us that is the way of life.

Let me do a little theological hair-splitting again like I did last week. I personally don't believe that God has predestined us, determined our lives from the beginning. I don't believe that God has a file on us somewhere up in heaven – “let's see Will Burhans: will grow up in Richmond, Virginia, go to William and Mary, a Benedictine Monastery, seminary in Berkeley California, pastor a church in Charlotte... ok, let's see here... here we go – next Will comes to love so much the 2009 capital campaign at the Charlotte church that he decides to become a professional fundraiser...” NOT. So I don't believe that's how it works. Please tell me it doesn't work that way!

But I also have to say neither do I believe that our lives are a random set of circumstances and happenstances that we are yanked around by, that its all up to us the make the most of the random happenings of life and then we die. Please tell me that's not what its all about. Instead I would say that the uniqueness that is each one of us exists because we have been called forth into existence by the Source of the Universe. And this Source (a.k.a. God, Allah, Yahweh), because SHE has called us uniquely and particularly, has a particular line or path of becoming for each us. And we in all our amazing and terrible freedom have the choice to be aligned with that particular path or not. Being aligned to the path is the way of life. Stepping off it and doing something else is sure death, like if I became a professional fundraiser. I think it would literally kill me. So our work is to ask ourselves “who am I, what is my calling in life, what is my joy and passion, where do I really belong” and then to have the courage to not just think about those questions but to live into the answers that come.

The only caveat I would make is this: I understand this to be true in the freest of human situations and that it is also true that many many people in the world are not afforded the *opportunity* to find their path of life and becoming because of human systems of oppression, violence and death. However, this is all the more reason in my mind for those of us who are afforded the luxury of being able to ask “who am I, where am I going, what is my calling” and who have the means to pursue the answers we find to such questions, should be faithful to the privilege. It sounds like a selfish pursuit, but I bet that if we did it faithfully, really sought to living into our call, that we would inevitably find ourselves moving in the opposite direction of self-indulgence to a place of greater connectedness and care for one another because that's what callings look like that

come from the voice of God. So called “callings” that divide us from one another or lead us to protect only ourselves and our own or lead us to accumulate more than we need at the expense of others are “callings” that come from a voice other than God’s.

SO what is the way of life for you? How has the Source of the Universe called you and are you living within that call? Are you LIVING or are you living a sort of “eh, why not” kind of life? You are the only one who can determine that but it’s not a bad idea to have a community around you that can say to you – “you know, I’ve noticed that you come to LIFE when you talk about this or that. You need to pursue that! You need to do more of this!” God wants us to be fully alive and for each of us God has laid out a pathway towards being more fully alive. Are you coming more to LIFE doing what you are doing and being where you are or are you just getting through to the next pay check, the next vacation, the next weekend, the next whatever. Most of us in this room have the privilege to ask ourselves if what we are doing is bringing us to life and so my theory is that we MUST ask it.

And if we have family members or friends who don’t want us to ask it, who would rather we settle for the “eh, why not” sort of living then we need to get new friends and family... no, I’m just kidding, maybe new friends, but not new family. What we need to do is find the people in our lives who are going to say to us ARE YOU REALLY LIVING? What REALLY is your JOY! What really is keeping you from living within your great love and passion. It’s not God. Trust me! God wants people who are living fully alive. What’s keeping us from living in our great love and passion? The theologian Frederick Buechner says “our vocation is where our deep joy and the world’s deep hunger meet”. That’s where God wants us. Are we living your deep joy? Well, why not? Because we don’t even know what that joy is? That’s OK! Then we need to begin or keep asking the question: what is my deep joy God that you have called me to live? And then when we hear the answer we can’t dismiss it or abuse it. We can’t listen to those voices that then us – don’t be ridiculous, you can’t do that, that’s unreasonable, that’s impractical, that won’t work, that’s not respectable enough, that’s not lucrative enough, etc. Those voices are the voices of those who have been unable to live their own joys and so find it too painful for you to live your joy. So as I said before we’ve then got to find other people. We’ve got to find people in our lives who ARE living their passion

and joy and listen to THEM! Pay particular attention to the irrational ones around us, the unreasonable ones, the idealistic ones, the crazy ones with a spark in their eyes, the ones where we might even be tempted to say “isn’t it too early in the morning for you to have been drinking?” Like they said of the disciples at Pentecost.

This is what Pentecost is all about. It’s the story of the disciples finally finding their calling! Once Jesus had gone, they were floundering, they were lost, they were questioning who they were and what they were going to do next and why and where. And then WHAM! They received a dose of Spirit, inSPIRation, so powerful that it felt like tongues of flame descending upon them. They were freakin’ out so that the people around them were saying “are they drunk?” But others were totally inspired by them and coming to life through them! The disciples didn’t listen to the people who were saying “are you drunk” but they watched the fire spread from them to others and were blown away by how everyone was coming to life around them, awakening, living as though for the first time! And in the face of the fire, in the face of that living, I tell you, DEATH itself meant nothing. Death became merely a blip on their radar within this immense sense of life. Go ahead kill me! This life in me is so immense that it will go on living! This passion inside of me is so powerful that death is nothing more than an annoying gnat. And death is like – “darnit! You are suppose to be terrified of me and you are suppose to live your life in fear so as to avoid me and then not only do I get you in the end but I have all these legions of the living dead as well!” death says, “darn it, man. Stop these Jesus-freak people from coming to life!” And we so “NO! it’s too late, we have come to live, we are living our joy, we are living our passion, we alive forever more! WAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHOOOOOOOOO!!!!!!

And that is Pentecost. As real and available today as it was for the disciples 2000 years ago if we are ready to stop merely thinking about how to live and instead begin to really live.