

**Pilgrim Church of Duxbury
January 29, 2016
Rev. Peggy O'Connor
Luke 2:25-55
Called To Carry**

Our sermon theme this month has been 'Call' and we have explored it from several different angles. The titles have been: Called to Follow...think Magi; Called to Go...think Moses; Called to Be...and now Called to Carry. I chose Call as our topic because it is one that most of us like to avoid. The very idea that God calls each and every one of us is not one we want to think about, mainly because we believe that a call from God will require too much of us. We worry it will require sacrifice and maybe hardship and we are sure that it will require us to give up our own dreams. So, we do the sensible thing, we act like Edwardians who don't like someone...we avoid and when avoiding is not possible we simply look in different directions and pretend God is not there...not calling us.

But in this series I have presented a different image of God's call to us. I have tried to help us see that God's call is not a negative but a positive thing in our lives and that to answer is not to give up but rather to enter into God's plan, which in the end is the path to fulfillment. Who here does not want to feel fulfilled? Don't we all? So then, let's see what this morning's passage has to tell us about finding such fulfillment.

The passage contains three stories. The first is about Jesus being presented in the Jerusalem temple eight days after his birth. There his

parents meet a man named Simeon...on whom the Holy Spirit rested. On the day Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the temple, the Spirit guided Simeon to go to the temple where he met the holy family. He knew immediately who the child was. Taking him in his arms he praised God saying he was ready to die for he had seen the salvation of the world. He blessed the parents and gave a prediction of the child's life. And Mary and Joseph were amazed.

The second story is about Anna, a prophet, who lived in the temple, worshipping, fasting and praying daily. She saw Jesus and praised God. Then she told everyone about the child. The parents, amazed at all they had seen and heard, returned home where Jesus grew up, filled with wisdom.

The third story is about the Holy Families' visit to Jerusalem during Passover, when Jesus was 12. When the festival was over they packed up and headed home but when the group they were travelling with stopped for the night Mary and Joseph realized Jesus was not with them. Panicked they hurried back to Jerusalem and searched for him for three days. Then they went to the temple and there he was sitting with the rabbis who were amazed at his knowledge. Mary and Joseph reprimanded Jesus who said ...how is it that you did not know where I would be? Don't you know I have to be in my Father's house? But they did not understand. Jesus clearly understands whose he is but no one else in this third story seems to. Even the rabbis don't know. They are amazed but as confused as his parents, who took him home.

What do these stories have to say to us about Call this morning? How are these ancient passages relevant to our lives today?

On the surface, it may seem hard to relate to the people in these stories. We have Simeon, a deeply faithful man who not only is convinced he will live to see the birth of the Messiah...but actually does see him...and recognizes who he is even though he is just a new born baby. And we have Anna, a widow who had a full life and then dedicated her later years to her faith...praying and fasting and living in the temple. Then there are the Rabbis; highly educated men who gave their entire lives to the study and application of their faith. And finally we have, Mary and Joseph who agreed to be a part of God's plan for the birth of the Messiah. How could we relate to this cast of characters? Surely they are people of far deeper faith than any of us. Right?

Actually that's wrong. For these are people just like us and it is in discovering ourselves in them and them in us that we overcome our fear of hearing and receiving God's call to each of us. They are us...we are them.

Let's look at Simeon. The story tells us that he was convinced that the Messiah would be born in his lifetime and old age has not dimmed his conviction. Simeon acts as an exemplar for us. 2000 years later, he reminds us of what we have lost...the expectation that Jesus will return...soon. This belief is a part of the bedrock of our faith. Jesus died, Jesus was resurrected, and Jesus will come again. What would it mean in our lives today if we fully embraced this...not just as a belief but as a reality we hoped to see in our

lifetime? How would it affect your life? Wouldn't it change everything? If you woke every morning asking "Is this the day I will meet the returned Christ?" how would it change your days? Would it change your priorities...your attitude? These are the changes that God's call brings to our lives. And this call, to believe with all your heart, your soul, and your mind, that Jesus Christ will come again is our call to faith and action. Simeon heard it and responded...will you?

Now, what about Anna? A widow who had dedicated her life so deeply to her faith that she lived in the temple. Whoa...that seems a bit much doesn't it? Well actually, I think that most people imagine that being a minister, a priest, a monk or a nun means living in constant communion with God; a life wholly unlike the average person's. But Emily and I can tell you that there is little difference. Working in a church or temple or mosque is still work. There are good days and bad days and lots of meetings and decisions that seem to have no connection with faith. Shall we paint the ceiling? Pave the parking lot? Use this kind of candle or that? No doubt she too had tasks to complete in the temple. But she came to whatever she did from the perspective of her faith...expecting to find God in the details. As a result she too recognized who Jesus was proclaimed him to everyone she saw. This is God's call to us as well...to proclaim Jesus Christ in word and deed.

I know that this causes many of us to recoil...especially in New England where we have earned the title the frozen chosen. We do not talk of our

faith. But in doing so I fear we leave our faith at church, where we can reclaim it on Sundays. But what use is a Sunday faith? How can it change you or the world? Surely we are called to both allow our faith to change and guide us and to share it. In doing so we help change the world. Had the disciples kept the Good News to themselves we would not be here. We, like them, are called to do more than keep things going.

Our fear stems from our idea that this means being a Bible thumper. But this is not what the disciples did or what Simeon or Anna did. They shared their faith through their actions, their presence in the temple and their willingness to share their faith with anyone who was interested. I believe that people are hungry for faith but skeptical about Christianity because all they hear about is the evangelical version full of exclusion and damnation. Their rejection of those ideas keeps them from walking in our doors. They need inviting. They need to know that this church will not tell them what they have to believe; they will not be told who to hate; they will not be told only some can serve. They need to be told that our mission is to create the beloved community that Martin Luther King Jr. talked about, where everyone is valued for who they are...rather than what they are. That we are about helping one another live out the greatest commandment...To love our God with all our hearts and to love one another in the same way. And they need to be told that we come to church, not because we are perfect but because we are far from it and because we want to help one another to improve.

Lastly, we come to the Rabbis and Mary and Joseph. They represent who we are right now. Like them we are amazed by our God and by Jesus. Like them we are unsure what to do. So we slip back into the rhythm of our lives. It is easier than seriously considering change. But Mary, Joseph and the Rabbis also do something that I am not sure most of us do...they keep pondering what they have seen and heard in their hearts. In other words, they plant seeds within their souls...hopeful for a crop of spring flowers.

I went to see Hidden Figures last week...have you seen it? I recommend it. I left the theatre feeling inspired and called. My take away from the movie was this: People matter because people make a difference. Individuals and small groups of people, when they stay the course, continue to show up, stay true to themselves and their faith and...wait for it...SPEAK UP...can and do make incremental changes that over time change hearts and minds. I believe that this formula...stay the course (which does not mean make no changes but rather keep showing up)...stay true to our God and one another ...and testify to the wisdom and truth of our faith...is the right one for this church.

I like to think of the faithful as rocks and faith as water that falls on us in single droplets...over time we are changed, shaped into bowls that serve God and others...offering living water to a thirsty world. God calls us...one by one...group by group...church by church to be Simeon...Anna...the rabbis and Mary and Joseph...to expect...to welcome and to ponder.