



Mission: Simply Asked

1 Samuel 3:1-9

Luke 4:14-21

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May the words of my mouth, the meditations of our hearts and the actions of our lives be acceptable in your sight, O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

It is a most stunning image painted by New Westminister's Steven Galloway in his recent novel "The Cellist of Sarajevo." Do you remember back in the 90s, the war in the former Yugoslavia? In the midst of the longest city siege in modern history, the siege of Sarajevo that lasted nearly 4 years, in which 10000 people were killed and 56000 were wounded, this in a city with approximately the same population as Surrey, a siege which turned this (images) into this (images)- in the midst of all that, Galloway tells the story which he has fictionalized, but which actually has a base in history, the story of a cellist. You see madness had gripped the former Yugoslavia, and the two sides were locked in a stand-off that held Sarajevo and her people captive. These ethnic groups which had formerly lived side by side and taken some pride in their peaceful coexistence were tearing each other apart and holding the population for ransom in the process.

Galloway's novel tells the story of a cellist who, in response to the shelling of a market killing 22 ordinary people standing in a bread line, decided to go out on the street, in broad daylight, in the line of fire, and play Albinoni's Adagio in G major, 22 days in a row in honour and lament for the 22 lives lost. And over the course of those 22 days, this musician, through his music and his act of foolish, life-risking creativity, reminded a city in the grip of self destruction, reminded it of its humanity.

What do you do when you are under siege and slowly being ground down by the constant bombardment and the desperate need to survive that pits neighbor against neighbor in the search for food or water, and you are slowly seeing a civilized community become a collection of individuals scratching for survival. What do you do when you see your neighbors and you feel yourself slowly closing in on yourself and closing off from each other. Well, apparently if you are a cellist, you muster your courage and step out into the street, and play as if it were the last thing you were going to do in your life. And as you pour yourself out, you set up sound waves that reach beyond the shells encrusting the hearts of your city, and awaken humanity. It was not about changing the world. It was about preserving dignity, and humanity, precious gifts that can so easily slip like sand through our fingers.

I tell you this story because it is such a stunning example of someone who, in a particular situation has discovered something that is so compelling that he can't not do it. The cellist has come to a point in his life in which he simply must play, must put his gift on the line, must even risk his life because he knows that this is what he is here for and if he doesn't do it, he will be letting his life purpose pass him by.

Have you discovered your life purpose? Have you ever had the experience of being involved in something and having the feeling that it so fits with who you are and so speaks to you that you

could say, yes, this is what I am meant for? Trenea picked up Kendrick from pipe band practice a while back, and Kendrick, who was 9 at the time I think, just loves the pipe band, loved to play, loved the group thing, feels utterly at home in that world. And he was sitting in the back seat on the way home and he said, "Mommy, I love Mondays. I love piping. You know I think I was born to play the bagpipes." This coming out of a 9 year old. But you know, I think he is on to something in his child-like clarity. He has experienced the confluence of the joy of something, his own skill at it, and a mystical something that happens when you and your life come together in a purpose. Sometimes we can find the words and sometimes we just know, this is what I am here for. Call it mission, calling, we have discovered the place in life where our soul and our circumstance meets up.

I believe that everyone has a calling, a mission in life- that you are here for something, and that something is important. There is meaning in everyone. I believe that we here at Northwood have a purpose, a mission in life, a reason we are here. And sometimes we can give words to that, and sometimes we are utterly unsure, often we only discover the meaning of things and the purpose in our place in life in retrospect, but I believe it is there. I believe it is important to try to understand what we are doing here and how it is connected to our soul.

Samuel was another one of those miracle babies in the bible, a child born to a woman who was barren. His mother, Hannah, had made a deal with God in her distress over infertility, that if she was given a child, she would dedicate his life to God. And she is given a child, Samuel and at the age of three she gives him to the priest, Eli, to train him in the service of God. Well some years later, Samuel is sleeping in the sanctuary, Eli is sleeping in the anti-room behind the sanctuary, and God comes to Samuel. "Samuel!" God says. Samuel wakes up and thinks that Eli is calling him. No, Eli says. I wasn't calling you. Go back to bed. It happens again. "Samuel." Again, he thinks it is Eli. No. A third time it happens but this time Eli is alert and realizes that the boy is being called by God. So he says to Samuel, if that happens again, it is God speaking and simply say, "I am here Lord. And listen."

That is the first task in knowing our purpose, it is to listen, to pay attention, to our soul, to what we long for, to who we are in our depths, and to our circumstances.

The second thing is that our purpose doesn't simply arise out of nothing, but it arises out of the flow of life, our heritage, where we have been, where our people have been. So that when Jesus, for example, comes back to Galilee after a time of struggle in the desert, he enters the synagogue and is given the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. And he reaches in to that great heritage of the prophetic tradition and finds a few words that ring in his soul and his circumstance, and he reads them. "The spirit of the Lord is upon me..." And he sits down and they wait, because they know it is not finished, because he needs to say, "This is it folks. This is why I am here." His purpose was not something utterly unique but could be found by reaching back, and bringing some great and ancient wisdom to bear on the present.

And the third thing is that it is not all about us. When we have discovered our purpose, we realize that we are not alone, that our purpose nestles in a web of relationships, and we cannot fulfill our purpose independent of those around us. "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing, Jesus says. It is not just about me, but it is about you hearing it, witnessing it, seeing it fulfilled. The cellist of Sarajevo had a purpose, deep soul purpose, life risking purpose. But without the community around him, it would have been futile. It was not simply about him and his cello, but about awakening humanity, preserving dignity in the people of Sarajevo.

I have been here for nearly three years now and I have been sort of holding Northwood's mission statement, looking at it, looking at the way in which it resonates in our soul and in the circumstances in which we find ourself as a community. It is "Embracing our community with the love of Christ." This is what this community over time has prayerfully, thoughtfully, discerned and distilled as its holy purpose, its reason for being here. It is the thing that we have said speaks to our soul and to our circumstance. Well for the next few weeks I want to dedicate the sermon time to reflecting on that statement. I want to shed the light of scripture on it. I want to listen to how it resonates in you and in our world. Because I believe that we are simply asked to live with purpose, to not let life slip through our fingers like sand, but to grasp it, make something of it, to live our calling, to do, as Kendrick says, what we are born for. Amen