Sense of Call

 A common question that I’ve been asked when I’ve spoken at a guest at events; when I was young seminarian; and practically as I began at every church in ministry, usually in someone’s living room during a visit as we got to know each other is, “So how did you know you want to be a pastor?” I’m always quick to answer, “that’s a long story, and I never really intended to…” but it is an interesting journey for sure. In my vocation, many pastors, way more gifted at writing than I, theologians, and biblical commentators use language about the leading to a vocation in ministry as “a sense of call.” No matter what your vocation, what your good at, what you enjoy as a pastime, the ways in which you contribute to the work of the church and the ministry of the body of Christ, it’s all connected to a sense of call.

 Some of my earliest memories of “church” are connected to church music. I’m the son of a church musician. My mom was the pianist for the 8:30 or “early” service at the church we attended until I was a sophomore in high school. From going with her to the church while she practiced for Sunday’s, to singing in Ms. Marcie’s children’s choir, and as I aged up, participating in Darr’s “youth choir” (Darr was the organist and choir director), music was a big piece of my “sense of call.” There was a sense of fulfillment, and joy in sharing my musical gifts with the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Newberry, SC.

 I also remember in my younger years being on the rotation to be an acolyte (a fancy word for the person who lights candles at the beginning of worship and extinguishes them during the singing of the final hymn). I remember the excitement of getting to put on one of those cardinal red cassocks and a white surplus over the top. I remember chanting along with various pastors in my childhood as they led kyrie’s, chanted psalms, and various settings of Holy Communion liturgies from the green LBW hymnal.

I remember the first time I read lessons at church. Specifically, I remember one reading (I think) being from the book of Isaiah and having a bunch of words in it that I had to practice dozens of times at home before Sunday (and I still butchered a couple of them). I remember that first time I read, having to stand on one of the little wooden chairs from a Sunday School classroom to be able to see over the huge gold and black bible that resided on the lectern in the chancel of the sanctuary.

I remember being extended the opportunity to run the sound board up in the balcony when I was in middle school. I was given the responsibility to make sure that microphones were on at the right points in worship and to make sure that equipment was running smoothly so that VHS recordings were made so that shut-in’s would be able to watch Sunday’s worship service later in the week.

I remember the first youth Sunday that I was asked to deliver a message aka preach a sermon. God bless the youth group leader who thought it was good idea to let an 8th grader, whose life was turned upside down by hormones, the stressors of middle school, and added on top of all that, trying to figure out my own perspective on the whole “God” thing; but no one threw tomatoes at me that Sunday, and no one passed out, so it must’ve not been too heretical.

Fast forward several years, I’m in college, having just left Winthrop University where I began my college journey with the intention to be a high school band director, and the pastor at the church where I attended said, “Vern, have you ever thought about going to seminary?” All of these different moments were part of that “sense of call.” And all of these moments, I’m convinced, were part of God saying, “Vern, this is you. You are called to this.”

I think about my sisters and about how they would play with their Barbie’s, stuffed animals, even me, pretending to treat “boo-boos” and illnesses. I remember my middle sister’s love of children, and her sense of call to work in labor in delivery. I remember my youngest sister and how she was impacted by my cousin’s journey and eventual death from complications related to lymphoma (cancer). Both sisters listened to a “sense of call” and now care for people in their vocations as registered nurses.

If you’re reading this and are still in the “working-world,” I’m willing to bet that what you chose to do in life wasn’t just because you woke up one morning and said, “I think I’ll do this for the rest of my life.” Whether revealed loud and clear, or very subtle, what you do is likely influenced by someone, some experience, some curiosity, some “sense of call.” God bless you as you continue serving in that calling.

Speaking of serving in our callings, we are all also uniquely gifted for service in the church. Some might have a love for feeding. Others might have a love for advocating for the marginalized. Some might have a knack for knowing how to repair a faucet or fix the hinge on a door. Others might find fulfillment in leading in worship. Some might have a passion for being a role model in the lives of young people. Others might take delight in visiting the sick and the homebound. There’s a countless list of ways that we live out our vocation as followers of Jesus and as we live and serve as the church together. If you’ve never done (or haven’t done in a long time) some intentional prayer and reflection about your “sense of call” in the work of the church, I invite/challenge you to do make space for listening for that “sense of call.”

Every month we have an event, LIGHT Night, where our different ministry teams meet. It’s not realistic that everyone can always make these gatherings. However, I want to commend to you to try and attend these Wednesday evening events when you can. And if Wednesday isn’t a day that your calendar cooperates with attending an event at church, seek out a way to get involved one of the other six days of the week. Because we are church together, and God is calling us individually and as a congregation to show up; to be Jesus’ hands and feet in this community and in the world. God is calling us to be a bold, loving, community. So, listen for that “sense of call,” because God is calling you to “let your light shine.” And may the Spirit bless us as we listen to that sense of call and live out that sense of call with one another.

The Peace of Christ be with y’all,

Pastor Vern