

“Mind your Ps: Particular People. Particular Plan & Purpose. Promised Presence & Power”

*Moses said to God, “... you have said to me,
‘Bring up this people’; but you have not let me know whom you will send with me.
...you have said, ‘I know you by name, and you have ... found favor in my sight’.
Now if I have found favor in your sight, show me your ways,
so that I may know you and know that I have found favor in your sight.
Consider too that **this nation is your people.**”
And Moses continued, “If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here.
For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us?
In this way, **we shall be distinct, I & your people, from every people on the face of the earth.**”
God said to Moses, “I will do the very thing that you have asked...
“My presence will go with you...”. [Exodus 33:12-17a]*

In some freer church traditions, pastors rely on the Holy Spirit
to lead them to a particular passage of scripture on which to preach.
Traditions like ours generally follow a lectionary –
in other words, there are assigned readings for each Sunday of the year.
We’ve used the Narrative Lectionary, which assigns one long lesson and one very short one
to each Sunday over a four-year cycle,
and now we are using the Revised Common Lectionary which assigns 4 readings
for each Sunday over a three-year cycle,
& also semi-continuous options for the readings from the Hebrew scriptures and Psalms,
and sometimes alternate lessons as well.
So usually I have 4 to 6 readings, and sometimes up to 8 or 10 to choose from.

Pastors from the free church, tradition often feel constrained by following a lectionary,
but it has been my experience that the Holy Spirit is able to work either way.
I seldom feel constrained, because almost every week I find something in the scripture
that I feel the spirit is leading me to preach on.
And not only do I usually find something, but sometimes what I find is a remarkable gift.

From the moment our council approved the motion that we will vote on next week –
to live or to die – I felt a great sense of peace.
After all, we will be making the very decision that God asks us to make in Deuteronomy,
where God says, “I lay before you the path of death and the path of life. Choose life.”
That peace I felt was unshakable – until last weekend when several things kind of rocked my boat –
and I felt the wind and waves of anxiety and uncertainty, instead of that calm unshakable peace.
And then, on Sunday night, as I began to prepare for this Sunday’s worship,
I read this first reading from Exodus, and the stormy waters calmed immediately!
Because I knew that this reading was specifically for me and for you.
In it, Moses is having a conversation with God.
He reminds God that God has chosen this people, that God has chosen Moses to lead them,
and that God has chosen them for a particular reason.
And God promises to go with them.

So there are 3 things we need to remember from this passage today.

1. God chooses particular people.

So I invite you to think back.... Who were some of the people that God chose?

Abraham -
Moses -
David -
Mary -
Jesus -
Saul -

2. God chooses particular people for a particular purpose and plan.

What did God choose the people we just listen to do?

Abraham - to be the father of a great nation, and then the father of many nations
Moses - to convince Pharaoh to let the Hebrew people go
David - to be king of Israel
Mary - to bear the Messiah
Jesus - to be the Savior of the world
Saul - to spread Christianity to the world

And now we go back to number 1, that God chooses particular people

because it's important to note that God has a preference for the least the last and the lost.

God almost always chooses the least likely candidate.

So what made the people we've talked about least likely to be chosen?

Abraham - chosen to be the father of many nations when he had no children at age 75!
Moses - chosen to talk Pharaoh into basically letting Egypt's entire workforce of Hebrew people go,
when he had trouble talking, probably because he stuttered,
and when he had a price on his head in Egypt for having murdered a man!
David - chosen to be king when, as the youngest of 8 sons, his very own father
didn't think it worthwhile to even mention his existence
to the prophet who had come to anoint one of Jesse's sons
Mary - chosen to bear the Messiah when she was just a young, unmarried girl
who seemed completely and totally ordinary!
Jesus - chosen to be Savior of the world
when he was only a wandering rabbi from a tiny nation in the middle of a desert!
Saul - chosen to spread Christianity when he had been trying to wipe out the church!

Do you think any of these people had seen themselves as people who would change history?

as people who would be remembered and whose stories would be told for thousands of years?

Do you think any of them felt qualified to complete the mission to which God called them?

Of course not.

But, you see, God does not call the qualified; God qualifies those he calls.

And God does that for a reason.

And here we get to the 3rd point:

- 3. God wants to make it clear that the success of the mission
does not in any way rely on the competency of those he calls,
but solely on God's promised presence and power.**

So, to recap:

1. God calls particular people.
2. God calls particular people for a particular purpose and plan; and
3. To the particular people whom God calls for a particular purpose and plan,
God promises his presence and power.

Every single human being has been created for a particular purpose and plan.

Each one of you sitting here and each person listening on Facebook or on YouTube
has been created for a particular purpose and plan.

And God has promised his presence and power

to those who have heard their call and responded by living into it with faith.

But God does not just call individual people.

God calls whole groups of people in the same way that God calls individuals.

For example, God chose a particular people, Israel.

And God chose them for a particular plan and purpose.

God chose an unknown person named Abraham to be the father of a great nation
and then God chose that tiny, powerless nation in the middle of an unknown desert,
to be to be a light to the nations.

God blessed Israel so that Israel might be a blessing to others.

And even as Israel murmured and complained and whined and wailed and disobeyed,
God continued to lead them with a pillar of fire by day and a pillar of fire by night,
with the law and the prophets and the writings, and with the promised Messiah.

God through Jesus chose another group of people – the 12 disciples

God chose 12 uneducated Jewish men living under Roman occupation for a particular plan and purpose.

God chose them to take the good news of Jesus into all the world & found a whole new religion.

And even though they were filled with fear after Jesus' crucifixion, and with uncertainty after his resurrection,
God kept his promise of presence and power by filling them with the Holy Spirit.

And I believe that God has called another particular people –

Salem Lutheran Church in Bridgeport, CT – for a particular plan and purpose.

Like the tiny nation of Israel who had been attacked and conquered and beaten down and occupied,
so we at Salem are a small group who have been in some ways
attacked and conquered and beaten down and occupied from within and without.

Like Israel who might have been considered the cesspool of the world,
so we hear in Bridgeport have often been considered the arm pit of New England.

The rest of the synod and the rest of New England may see us as insignificant and powerless,
as the least likely candidate to carry out God's plan and purpose, but that is exactly how God works.

God did not choose us to start a new mission when we were at the height of success.

God chose us at the point when some people from within and without see us at the brink of death.

But that is exactly why God waited until now to call us to be his particular people,
chosen for a particular plan on purpose.,

in order that when we succeed, it will be obvious to all of the world

that it was not because of our own power, but it was only through God's promised presence, and power.

In the reading assigned for today Moses says to God, "You have called me to lead this people,
and You have called this particular people for a particular plan and purpose.

But we cannot do it without you. We need your promised presence and power.

And God said to Moses, "I will do what you asked. My presence will go with you."

Last Saturday, I said something very similar to God. I said, "You have called me to lead these people,
and you have called this particular people for a particular plan and purpose,
but we can't do it without you. We need your promised presence and power."

And then on Sunday night, I read this lesson, and in it, I heard God's answer to my prayer:

"I will do what you've asked. My presence will go with you."

I believe that God has called us as his particular people.

I believe God has called us for a particular plan and purpose.

And I believe that God has promised that his presence and his power will go with us.

My prayer is that you, too, will understand

that **as we live into our call as a particular people, called to a particular plan and purpose,
we will trust in the promise and presence and power of the living, loving God. Amen**