

Sermon “Sorry I Can’t Do That”
Kirk of St James
Sunday January 28th 2024
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I read a humorous article this week about the word “sorry” being a part of our national Canadian identity. Since it is such an ingrained part of our culture, researchers did a study on what provinces and areas of Canada say it the most. On average the study found that Canadians say sorry approximately nine times a day. At the beginning of the research there was an assumption that the Maritimes would likely rank high on this list, but in end we didn’t even make the top ten! The number one spot was snagged by Burlington Ontario for an astonishing eighteen “sorries” a day. The flip side of this is that they are also the city that swears the most at fifteen times a day. Following Burlington was Oakville with fifteen apologies, and Longueuil Quebec with fourteen. One of the things that struck those doing the study (as well as myself) was how we perceive things. For some it was surprising when no where in the Maritimes made it into the top ten, and others were surprised that three Quebec cities did. Our assumptions and expectations are sometimes out of touch with what is true.

This can be true when we read our Bible as well. When we look at the scriptures, we often see these major biblical characters who answered God’s call in their lives, and then did incredible things. We hear about Abraham who set off toward the Promised Land, and the promise of a Son. Moses led his people out of slavery, was able to bring forth water from a rock, and cross the Red Sea. David the shepherd became a king. Joseph was taken into slavery and eventually became an advisor to a Pharaoh. We get caught up in their stories because we know them, we know where they end up, and how they succeed. However, we often lose sight of the fact that many of these people did not believe in their call at first. Moses argued with God, Abraham tried to fulfill the prophecy of a son himself. Even the prophets doubted their abilities, as we see Jeremiah this morning tell God, “Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.” In fact, almost every other person called in the Old Testament with the exception of Ezekiel objects their call.

There are a myriad of factors of why this could be. Calls often mean something new, or different and that can be scary. There is also doubt, perhaps both in what we are being asked to do, and our abilities. Whenever I am asked to do something outside of my comfort zone, I automatically assume I do not have the skills to do it. We might come up with excuses about time, other people being more gifted, or any number of other things. Plus, we also have our modern context to consider. What does it mean to be called? What does God call people to do? How does God call us? I know I am not out striking any rocks for water, and there have been no reports of anyone parting the sea from Borden to the mainland lately! The idea that we could be called in our daily lives can be swept away with the thought that only major biblical characters and spiritual people are called by God.

That is simply not true. It would be convenient if it were! The reality is as Christians we are all part of the story of God, we are called to the Great Commission that sends us back out into the world to share the Good News. We are to live out the radical nature of the gospel within the world we live in.

I believe one of the most difficult aspects of call today is how it happens. Moses was lucky, he got a burning bush and voice. Abraham had angels visit. Joseph had dreams. In our context today we don't tend to have those Saul on the Damascus Road experiences. You might remember the television show *House* back in the 2000's. During that series there was an episode called *House vs. God* and in it he says, "If you talk to God, you are religious, if God talks to, you're psychotic." Not an overly helpful sentiment, is it?

Despite all of this we are reminded that God's mission is not yet accomplished, and even the most jaded, weary ex-idealist can still be hauled by God into a new place. If we were smart, we should likely be checking over our shoulders from time to time, because you never know when we might be called.

All that being said, what is that like? Have you as a result of your faith, ever felt like you were called to do something? I know some of us might say yes, and others might say I have never felt that before, and all of these experiences are valid. A lot of people when they first meet me ask how I decided to become a minister. I wish I could say I had a burning bush experience, which would have

made it easier. The truth is, it was just an idea that would not leave me alone, and I as took steps forward also tried to make it difficult for myself. I was feeling that ministry might be the direction my life was going but, I also felt a lot like Jeremiah. There are a number of reasons I choose Acadia but one of them was because even though I would have my Master of Divinity, I also could not be called or ordained without further study. My plan didn't work that well.

For most of us this might be what call looks like. An idea that won't leave us alone, a thought you can't shake. The idea might feel crazy, irrational, ridiculous, or impossible. It might be something we keep being brought back to throughout our lives. Sometimes our call might simply be to continue loving God and our neighbour, and sometimes it might be more than that. Maybe it is starting a breakfast group, a support group, praying for someone, helping someone etc. This process of call and discernment will go into our next round of New Beginnings as the results of the four groups are brought together and we consider the ways people are feeling the ministry of the church is being called.

Throughout my reading for this week there are some common strands of thought that come with the topic of call. The first is that we often feel we are not up to the task--luckily, it is not about what we think we can do. It is about God who knows what we are capable of and chooses us even when we disagree.

The second is that it can be a struggle figuring out what way is the best way to go. Jeremiah and others have given us a wonderful cross section of arguments and excuses and that is nothing new. "I couldn't do that, I don't have the training," "I couldn't do that, I don't have many talents to offer." "I am too new here; I can't do anything." That is normal. Whenever we are called to do something that is new to us, we likely will experience some feelings of inadequacy. Our reasons for not doing something are often both reasonable and justifiable. Luckily, God isn't worried about our qualifications—God just hopes that eventually we say yes.

Which brings me to the last thing the readings had in common this week. Out of all the phrases in the Bible the one that is recorded the most is "do not be afraid." That is followed by phrases about faith, peace, and love. Why is "do not be afraid" such a common phrase in the bible? I don't have an

official answer except to say that within faith we take a leap of trust, we believe in God who inverts a lot of the things the world would have us believe. We take these steps not because it is clear and easy but because we know it is what we are to do as Christians. Sometimes we do have to say yes, and just see where it takes us. Let me tell you I had a long think before I asked the session if we could bless animals in the church. It doesn't always make sense, but sometimes in our bones we know it is important.

I want to close today with some encouragement from a retired Episcopal priest in the states. He wrote, "As baptized Christians no one can identify us by what we wear. Our faith is evidenced by what we do and what we say. Our call to serve the God who shadows us is to speak a word of truth in daily life. We are asked to respect the dignity of every human being. Hardest of all, and easily the riskiest road we dare, is the road that seeks justice and counters evils, letting the face of Christ emerge in love of neighbour. Sometimes we must even speak a word of judgment or just say no. This calling will never be easy if it is the calling of God. To do these things is to recognize those holy moments and touches of grace that really do plant and build up."

Faith goes hand in hand with trust and that is not always easy. We will doubt, we will defer, we will question, and we will argue. Ultimately though more than anything else God just needs us to say yes, and to trust him for the rest. May we always find the courage we need, as God calls us to do the work.