

Easter 3
Church of the Good Shepherd, Silver City, NM

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No More Work

The resurrection costs us our work and gives to us ministry in its place.

A gazillion years ago I did a Masters in Intercultural Administration at the School for International Training in Brattleboro, VT. To be part of the program you had to have had significant experience overseas, and they preferred people with development experience. Toward the end of the program we had a kind of a job fair. They invited prospective students to come and ask us questions. At the time I was a cross-cultural trainer for Wycliffe Bible Translators and the Summer Institute of Linguistics, the same mission with which my parents served. One man asked me, "So what is the beginning salary, and what is the benefit package offered?" I stood there a bit befuddled. I had felt called by God to this work. I considered it ministry, not just a job, and I had raised the money for my own salary.

For the first time I began reflecting on the difference between employment and vocation. I realized that this was something we are called to do by Someone else, not something we chose to do, except in the element of obedience. The more I think about that the more profound the difference becomes. Our own Jeanie Locicero is in exactly the same place. She is working at 6th Street Elementary School as a teacher, but she is also in a discernment process. The question before her is not, "does she want to be a priest," but, "is God calling her to be a priest?"

In two of today's lessons we see how it works. In the Gospel lesson, it's after the resurrection. Peter and the others have seen Jesus in the upper room. They have heard other reports about Jesus being alive, as well, but they're not really sure yet what it means. Peter says, "I'm going fishing." It's what he knows. It's his job, his means of bodily support. It's his work. Others (whom we can also presume to be the fishermen among them, James and John) go with him, and they work all night—working. In the morning they see a man standing on the shore.

"Have you caught anything?" he asks innocently.

"No, nothing all night."

"Throw the net on the right side of the boat."

I've seen cartoon drawings of this of a big shoal of fish right under the other side of the boat, separated from empty water by the boat's shadow, but I don't think this is what it is talking about. It's not the right side vs. the left side, which is a choice anyone can easily make from their own ego. It's the right side vs. the wrong side. Will they surrender to this stranger's command, or will they continue to try to fish from the place of their own egos? Of course, they obey, and they can't haul in the fish there are so many, and they realize that there is someone who knows something about fishing on the shore. In fact, Peter then recognizes him as the one who told them he would make them fishers of people. Yes, he knows something about fishing.

When they get to the shore and have breakfast then Jesus speaks with Peter. His has been called Peter's restoration, since Jesus asks him if he loves him the same number of times that Peter denies him as recorded by John, but set in the context of fishing I think another interpretation also bears consideration. Jesus is teaching Peter what it means to be called as a fisher of men. "Do you love me? Feed my sheep." Jesus is asking Peter to answer the call to ministry. He will now truly make him a fisher of people. The locus of Peter's control of his life will no longer be his ego, it will be his spirit that loves Jesus and follows Jesus, and serves Jesus in all that he does. As such it would not have been something Peter chose, but something Jesus chose. The resurrection has cost Peter his work, and granted him a ministry instead.

With this in mind it is easy to see what happens to Paul on the way to Damascus. He is doing what he believes is the work of God—trying to exterminate those pesky Christians. He has chosen this work out of his ego, his need to be right and his need to do something in the face of what he takes to be a great evil. The tell-tale signs are evident in the violence he is willing to employ. All of a sudden—ZAPP! He meets Jesus in a blinding light. The light blinds him to his previous ego-driven agenda, and allows him to surrender to another way—of serving what he had tried to kill. His work is taken away from him, and in its place he receives a ministry.

The same is true of us. If we have truly encountered the risen Christ we can no longer afford our empty functionalism. What was once something we chose because it was something we wanted to do, or the pay and bennies were good, or because it was the place we wanted to live. For whatever reason, the motivation we experience is from our egos—and it is work. It is done for our own sake, and by our own choosing. It is entirely self-referential and self-serving, even if it is with the best of intentions and purist of motives.

A relationship with the risen Lord requires that we give that up. Instead we will receive a ministry. A ministry is done for love of God and for the advancement of God's kingdom.

It certainly uses our best talents, engages our passion and rewards our souls, but it does those things because our vocation pulls together our own best selves, the heart of God and the need of the world.

Frederick Buechner said, "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."¹ It is not self-referential, and even if our own motives are not the purist, yet the activity is selflessly done, and therefore done from faith and love.

Does that mean that we should all become preachers? The teaching of Paul in Romans 12 is very clear that we have different gifts in the Church. Believe me there are some that should NOT be preachers in the Church, and I know you have heard some of them. Paul also writes, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."² We can no longer afford to do what we do from our egos, but from that place deep within where God calls us to live. According to St. Francis, that is preaching. "Preach, preach, and when all else fails, use words," is the line attributed to him (though probably apocryphally.) When we give up our ego-driven functionalism and accept our ministries we move from death into life.

This means two things. First, the world does not need Christian workers. What do you do with your days? If you are to live as a resurrected Christian then this is no longer what you are to do. Oh, you will most likely go back to doing just exactly what you were doing before, but now you will do it as a ministry rather than just a choice. It will be done for God, it will be done for the advancement of God's kingdom, and it will be done from love rather than from ego. So what do you do? Do you fix things? Fix them as if they are God's, for they are. Do you teach and guide people? Guide them as if you were guiding the Christ child, for you are. Do you heal? You are the hand of the healing Christ in the world. Do you handle money? You handle the riches of the Kingdom. Do you care for people? You are caring for Christ himself.

In second place, the Church does not need volunteers. We do not need people who fill positions because there is a gap and it needs to be filled--noble and selfless as that is. The Church needs ministers, people who are called by God into the roles they play, who fulfill their work at the Church and in the world from the heart as well as the head, whose passion is to do what they do for the glory of God. So do you sing? Sing from the heart. Do you set the altar? Do so as a prayer? Do you administer a program? Do it knowing that you answer to God. Do you give? Do so from a generous and happy heart. Do you serve on a committee? Do so as if Jesus himself were your chair. Do you welcome

¹ Buechner, Frederick. "Wishful thinking: a Theological ABC, (1973).

² I Corinthians 10:31.

people at the door? Welcome them as if they are Christ himself. Do you serve food? Do so from a grateful heart. Do you preach or teach? Do so with a humble spirit. Do you attend to the needs of children? Do it as a child of God.

The resurrection calls us to give up our empty ego-driven functionalism, and receive instead the ministry of God in the world today.