

Ordination Sunday

Reflection 1

I once heard a guy named Mike Foster tell this story about his life:

When Mike started high school, he looked like a lot of 9th grade boys. He was small, geeky, unathletic, not particularly talented or good looking. He played the french horn in the school band, which was not nearly as cool then as it is today. You get the picture? The beginning of high school was a pretty miserable time for Mike. He got teased, bullied. No one understood him; no one even tried to understand him. There weren't even many people who liked him, and he knew it.

But every day, when Mike went to the cafeteria for lunch, he'd open his lunch bag, and before he took out the sandwich and chips and cookie, he took out a note on yellow paper, a note that said, "Dear Mike, I hope you have a great day at school today. I love you, Dad." Every day. Every school day, for four years, Mike's dad made his lunch; and every day he wrote that same note on a piece of yellow paper.

It changed everything, Mike Foster said. Alongside all the voices in his head that were saying, "look at what you messed up; look at how many people don't like you; you can't do anything right," there was a voice that fought every day for space in his head, a voice that said, over and over again, "I know you can do this. I believe in you. I love you." It made all the difference in the world in how Mike got through those hard years.

To call yourself a Christian is to know that in one way or another, God writes you those notes every day. It's knowing that God has already looked at you and said, "I see you and I believe in you. I love you." In a hundred ways, every day, God is trying to remind you of that.

When we're baptized, we commit ourselves to looking in the right lunch bag, the one that has the note with God's handwriting on it—even when there are other things in the vending machines that might taste sweeter, or saltier. It's choosing to eat from the bag that holds God's love note to you.

And the calling of Christians—*every* follower of Jesus—is not only to take in that message, but to *become* that message to others. Sometimes we talk about 'the priesthood of all believers.' This is what that means: All of us carry God's message inside of us. *We* are God's love notes to the world.

Reflection 2

In Brené Brown's book *The Gifts of Imperfection*, she tells the story of meeting a young woman at a conference. Brené was happy to meet her, because she already owned a pair of earrings that this woman made; she bought them online.

“How long have you been a jeweler?” Brené asked her.

“I wish,” the young woman answered. “I’m just a CPA. I’m not a real jeweler.”

In the book, Brené says she thought, “Well, I’m wearing your earrings right now, not your abacus.” But what she said out loud is, “Of course you’re a jeweler.”

And the woman replied, “Well I don’t make very much money doing that. I just do it because I love it.”

You can hear how this young woman was selling herself short, can’t you. It’s easier to identify in someone else’s story than it is in our own. How often do we minimize the things we do for love, and think that it’s what we do for money that gives us purpose in life, and makes meaning of our days?

The great theologian Howard Thurman said, “Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.”

What makes you glad to be alive? What is it, that when you do it you forget about time? Or that makes you feel—even for a few minutes—like the world holds enough of everything you need? Is it being with your children, or your grandchildren? Growing beautiful tomatoes in your backyard so that you can hand them out to your neighbors? Talking on the phone with someone who is lonely? Handing someone a plate of food at Hope’s Corner?

Your calling is the work that has your name on it. It may or may not be your job, or your occupation. Maybe no one will ever pay you for it, maybe you will never be an expert at it, but your calling is still the thing you *have to do*.

You are called to live fully awake, fully alive. This is what the presence of God inside of you feels like. What is it for you? Go and do that.

Reflection 3

Clergypeople—people who are pastors—talk all the time about our calling to full-time ministry. When you’re in the process of being ordained, the people in charge say, “Tell us about your sense of call.” When we’re getting to know each other, we say, “Tell me your call story.” And usually what we mean by that is, How did you know that this was the thing you wanted to commit your life to doing?

I didn’t have a single moment when I knew that God was calling me to ministry. And my sense of call has shifted over time. I don’t tell my call story the same way today as I did when I started seminary 25 years ago. But there are two pieces of my call to ministry that have been constant. And our focus this morning invites me to share them with you today.

I feel called to re-tell the stories of the Christian tradition in a way that helps people make sense of their lives now. I don’t believe that the Bible is the only way we know about God. I think God mostly speaks to us in the things that happen to us every day. Those help us make meaning out of what happens to us. They’re like frames around the photos of our lives. When you come back from something harder than you thought you could survive, let’s call that death and

resurrection. When you feel too small to do any good, remember that it has always been the powerless, invisible people that God has called on to make a new way.

The second persistent piece of my calling—and this might be true for every pastor I know—is to live my faith transparently, visibly. So much of what we talk about in church sounds abstract, a little fuzzy. As I come to the end of every sermon, I imagine you asking me, “So what is it you want me to do?” Faith is something to be lived out in this life. It’s full of stumbles, stops and starts, falls, do-overs. It’s hard, and it’s not always inspired. My calling as your pastor is to be willing to say that out loud, to let you see in my own missteps and doubts that being uncertain is part of faith, not a betrayal of it.

You are loved. You are called to live your whole life as a follower of Jesus, just like I am. And you are called to be fully alive, fully *yourself*, just as God created you to be.