

Just a job or a vocation?

Patricia Datchuck Sánchez | Feb. 2, 2013 | Spiritual Reflections

What do you do for a living? This is a common question, easily answered: "I'm a teacher, nurse, architect, chef, accountant, lawyer," etc. Each answer points to a personal choice and suggests years of study and preparation in a specific field. Each job provides individuals with a means of supporting themselves and those they love. At times, however, even the best of jobs can become a necessary but tedious chore.



How might our tedium ease, our attitude improve, our spirit be lifted if we see what we do in life with fresh eyes? What if we consider our job and our very existence as a vocation?

Speaking to this question, Walter Brueggemann once said that we have been called into being and into an everlasting relationship with a divine covenantal partner (*The Bible Makes Sense*, St. Mary's Press, 1980). Life is a continuing dialogue of call and response with a compelling Other who bestows love and mercy and expects our response with fidelity and accountability.

Our relationship with our Creator, Provider, Protector and Redeemer gives us a frame of reference from which we make deliberate decisions about our world, our freedom and our personal responsibility for the well-being of others. We are to live in a manner that reflects and responds to the life-giving action of God, which has been given its fullest expression in Jesus. In emptying himself in loving obedience, in suffering for the sake of sinners, Jesus has revealed the very goodness of God. Brueggemann says that our vocation consists in following God's example and emptying ourselves, entering into solidarity with the weak, just as God has done throughout human history.

For Jeremiah, who shares his vocational experience in today's first reading, emptying himself consisted in leaving behind family, friends and the joys of his youth to speak an unpopular message to Judah's uninterested and often hostile kings and princes, priests and people. With God's call, Jeremiah received all he would need to minister as God's prophet. God assured the prophet in a series of "I" statements: "I formed you," "I knew you," "I consecrated you," "I appointed you," "I command you," "I am with you." In the same way, God assures each of us and supports us so that we can answer the many calls that God extends throughout our lives.

In today's second reading, Paul paints a verbal portrait of God, and of Jesus, as love-come-alive. Love is the essence of God's character, and we, who also are called by love personified, are to respond in kind -- loving not only God, which is easy, but loving all others, which is a daily challenge. The ability to love freely and fully is God's gift. We, for our part, are to cultivate this gift so that our love does not consist in words only but in works that serve the needs of those who are lovable and those who are not. Their needs constitute God's call to us, and our care for them constitutes our response to God.

Luke, in today's Gospel, gives us a sense of how Jesus dealt with the challenges of his vocation. Jesus followed the suffering servant's mission to bring good news to the poor, proclaim liberty to captives, give sight to the blind and freedom to the oppressed (Luke 4:18) -- but then Jesus also had to bear the scorn of those who found him too familiar to be credible. His attempt to call forth the faith of his friends and neighbors went unanswered. Yet he did not depart from his course, nor did he preach only what would have been acceptable to his contemporaries.

Jesus did not allow his listeners to take a cafeteria-style approach to his teachings, choosing what they liked and refusing what they did not. Jesus never diluted his message concerning the universal and salvific concerns of God. He praised gentiles, like the widow of Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian, for their faith (Luke 4:25-27), and challenged his Jewish brothers and sisters to follow suit. Like the Jews, the gentiles are called by God to believe, to enter into a relationship and to consider their entire being as their response to a God who calls forth the best in each of us.

To what is God calling us today? Are we listening?

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