

“What is in a Name?”: Identity and Vocation”

Scriptural References

“And Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and Jacob's thigh was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then he said, "Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him, "Tell me, I pray, your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the name of the place Peni'el, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." The sun rose upon him as he passed Penu'el, limping because of his thigh. Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the sinew of the hip which is upon the hollow of the thigh, because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh on the sinew of the hip.” Genesis 32.24-32

“Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': this is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, "I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt; and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt, to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Per'izzites, the Hivites, and the Jeb'usites, a land flowing with milk and honey.'" Exodus 3.13-17

Psalm 139

- [1] O LORD, thou hast searched me and known me!
- [2] Thou knowest when I sit down and when I rise up;
thou discernest my thoughts from afar.
- [3] Thou searchest out my path and my lying down,
and art acquainted with all my ways.
- [4] Even before a word is on my tongue,
lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.
- [5] Thou dost beset me behind and before,
and layest thy hand upon me.
- [6] Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is high, I cannot attain it.
- [7] Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?
Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?
- [8] If I ascend to heaven, thou art there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there!
- [9] If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
[10] even there thy hand shall lead me,
and thy right hand shall hold me.
- [11] If I say, "Let only darkness cover me,
and the light about me be night,"
[12] even the darkness is not dark to thee,
the night is bright as the day;
for darkness is as light with thee.
- [13] For thou didst form my inward parts,
thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb.

[14] I praise thee, for thou art fearful and wonderful.
Wonderful are thy works!
Thou knowest me right well;
[15] my frame was not hidden from thee,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately wrought in the depths of the earth.
[16] Thy eyes beheld my unformed substance;
in thy book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there was none of them.
[17] How precious to me are thy thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
[18] If I would count them, they are more than the sand.
When I awake, I am still with thee.
[19] O that thou wouldst slay the wicked, O God,
and that men of blood would depart from me,
[20] men who maliciously defy thee,
who lift themselves up against thee for evil!
[21] Do I not hate them that hate thee, O LORD?
And do I not loathe them that rise up against thee?
[22] I hate them with perfect hatred;
I count them my enemies.
[23] Search me, O God, and know my heart!
Try me and know my thoughts!
[24] And see if there be any wicked way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting!

"The words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilki'ah, of the priests who were in An'athoth in the land of Benjamin, to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of Josi'ah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. It came also in the days of Jehoi'akim the son of Josi'ah, king of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of Zedeki'ah, the son of Josi'ah, king of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month. Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations. Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth." But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you you shall go, and whatever I command you you shall speak. Be not afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD." Then the LORD put forth his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant." Jeremiah 1.1-10

"Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit; and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel"(which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took his wife, but knew her not until she had borne a son; and he called his name Jesus." Matthew 1.18-25

"In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." Now John wore a garment of camel's hair, and a leather girdle around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then went out to him Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan, and they were

baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit that befits repentance, and do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on him; and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." Matthew 3.1-17

"Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do men say that the Son of man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Matthew 16.13-19

Articles

“The Name of the Lord is a Strong Tower”

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.” *Proverbs 18:10*

To the Hebrew mind, and in Biblical terminology, a name is more than just an identifying title for a person. A name carried with it the essence of a person - the character, reputation, (specifically, reputation by inheritance) authority, worth, ownership, and many other attributes descriptive of the person and all that the person represents.

The descriptive or summational character of the name is evident in Scripture. The list is long. I mention just a few just to illustrate the point.

- Abram's name was changed from Abram, which meant: "exalted father", to Abraham meaning: "father of a multitude" when he became a friend of God by faith, and founder of the nation of Israel through the covenant God made with him.
- Jacob means: "heel holder" or "supplanter" and was the son of Isaac, grandson of Abraham, and father of the 12 patriarchs of the tribes of Israel, and the name certainly was fitting in his part in the plan of God for Israel's beginnings, as he had to carry the birthright in order to fulfill his destiny of leadership in the line of the Messiah to come. God changed his name to "Israel" meaning "God prevails" and he had power with God and prevailed. (Genesis 32:28)
- Saul had his name changed to Paul after he had his encounter with our Lord Jesus. Saul was the Jewish name of the Apostle, meaning literally, "desired." It actually fits him before his conversion, doesn't it? He was certainly zealous and desired to do everything with a passion and determination to stamp out what he believed to be heresy, as we see in the records of his persecution of the church. He was desirous to pursue the legalistic letter of the law in his religious fervor. Paul, his Greek name, means "small or little." I believe this speaks volumes about the significance of his name. After he was chosen to become probably the most famous and

esteemed apostle of them all, he constantly, like John the Baptist, esteemed himself as the chiefest of sinners and of no repute when compared to our Savior. In his writing, he consistently lifts Jesus up and plays down his own importance. His name, being changed from a Jewish name to a Greek name also shows his calling, as he was highly instrumental and played a singularly important part in the Gospel being preached to the Gentiles from then on.

- Even the demons have names with significant meanings as in the case of 'Legion' in Mark 5:9. When asked for a name, the response was, "Legion, for we are many."

Names of people in the Old Testament culture had more meaning to them than personal names have for us in our culture. To the people of God – Israel – personal names generally expressed some personal characteristic, some incident connected with birth, some hope, desire, or wish of the parents. In the New Testament names also were of a more distinctive nature than they are today. Names in the New Testament times, at least among the Biblical Jews, represented certain aspects of the person. For example, "Jesus" is the English translation of the Greek word "Iesous" which is the equivalent of the Hebrew "Joshua" (Jehoshua) meaning: "Jehovah (is) salvation." Thus, "she shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins" ([Mat 1:21](#)).

Personal names given at birth were sometimes changed later in life for various reasons. Some names of people were changed by God to indicate what God was going to do with or through that person:

- Abram's name ("exalted father") was changed to Abraham ("father of many") because God was going to make him a father of many nations ([Gen 17:5](#))
- Sarai's name ("Jah is Prince") was changed to Sarah ("princess") because God was going to make her a mother of nations and kings of peoples would come from her ([Gen 17:15-16](#))
- Jacob's name ("supplanter" or *heel* catcher) was changed to Israel ("ruling with God" or "contender or soldier or prince of God") after he struggled with the angel ([Gen 32:28](#))
- Princes had their names changed on their accession to the throne ([2Kgs 23:34, 24:17](#))
- In the New Testament names were also changed during one's life time for various reasons. For example, Simon's name was changed to Peter and Saul's name was changed to Paul

A name of a single person or quality can also refer to a whole nation or all those with that single quality:

- *Israel*, the individual, or Israel, the nation
- *Christ*, the individual, or Christ, the whole Body of Spiritual people in Christ's Spirit (see *New Mind Papers*).
- *Seed*, the individual (Christ), or Seed in the sense of all those in the true Seed (see "Seed Paper" [PR 1]).
- *God's Spirit*, as individually distinctive versus other kinds of spirit, or any to all Spirits of the same nature as God's.
- *Satan*, as the individual, or any to all the spirits or angels of the same nature as Satan's.
- *Beast*, the individual, or the system of the Beast

So, we see that having a name is a precious thing. Names are a personal connection, a unique part of us. They do, in many ways, reveal who we are. What is more, to know someone's name is a very important part of growing in greater intimacy with that person. In the same way as our names have significance so does the name of God. It is important to know God by name. He has told us His name as a sign of His trust and desire for us to grow in an ever deepening relationship of intimacy with Him. In the Scriptures, the changing of a person's name denoted a change of character. Therefore, for God's name to be unchanging is a statement of His unchanging character; His attributes; and His nature. What is more, the sheer number of names by which He has revealed His unchanging character shows that He is without measure in His glory and splendor. It is wise therefore, to make it a priority in our lives to learn the names of God.

We can gain great encouragement through an exploration of God's nature and character by contemplating His name. As you are uplifted in meditating on His glorious name I would urge you to take that very opportunity to worship Him and in doing so, to experience His love and strength. Meditating on the name of God can be an awesome experience in the depths of His love for you.

“Calling, Identity and Bliss” by Dr. James W. Fowler

I would like to read to you from Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus. I'll be reading from the fourth chapter, verses one through six.

"I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling - one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all, and in all."

The apostle Paul writes in the fourth chapter of Ephesians, "I, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you therefore to lead a life worthy of the vocation to which you were called." The context of this verse in the letter to the church at Ephesus is plainly concerned about congregational unity. Here Paul's great metaphor of the church as the "body of Christ" is being appealed to as the purpose and basis for unity in the church. But it is the premise that lies behind the writer's appeal that most interests me. That premise: Each of us has been called to a vocation, and we are to lead a life worthy of the vocation to which we were called.

What is the vocation to which we have been called? How are we to walk the walk of our lives so as to be worthy of our vocations?

Vocation is bigger than job or occupation or career. Vocation refers to the centering commitments and vision that shape what our lives are really about. Vocation, rightly understood, gives coherence and larger purpose to our lives. It gives one's life integrity, zest, courage and meaning. Vocation links us with the purposes of God. Vocation is the fulfillment of the identity process.

To be in vocation is to find a purpose for one's life that is part of the purposes of God. Vocation is the response a person makes with his or her total life to the call of God to partnership. As such, vocation involves our lives in relation - our friendships, our family memberships, our love relationships, our marriages. It involves our lives in public - our roles as citizens, as members of voluntary associations, our actions for justice and care for the common good. Vocation also includes our ways of regularly finding recreation - the use of our leisure and times for renewal and restoration. Vocation includes our participation in religious community - our lives of worship, study, prayer, praise, and service. Finally, vocation includes the work we do - voluntary or paid - in childhood or retirement, as well as during the prime years of our adulthood. In vocation, all of these aspects of our lives find a kind of orchestration and a coherence as we grow in the devotion of hearts to responsiveness to God. In vocation, partnership with God constitutes the core of our evolving identity - the very construction of our lives.

As I reflect upon this matter of vocation in our lives, I find that it involves four great paradoxes:

1. I find it paradoxical to the point of amazement that a cosmic God, creator of a universe 15 billion light years in extent, should be concerned with us as individuals, knows us each one, and calls us into relationship and partnership. Listen to how Psalm 139 expresses this paradox:

You created my inmost self,
You knit me together in my mother's womb...
For so many marvels I thank you;
A wonder am I, and all your works are wonders...

You knew me through and through,
My being held no secrets from you,
When I was being formed in secret,
Textured in the depths of the earth..."

Here we have to do with the paradox of the Infinite and the finite: the high and the low. Here we're invited to see our lives, whatever the context of our service and living, as full of potential significance, due to our callings to be part of the work of God. In our faithfulness and commitment we can be employed in the larger pattern of God's being and action toward the redeeming and the fulfillment of creation.

2. A second paradox of vocation lodges in the beginning of that text from Ephesians that I read at the beginning: "I, the prisoner in the Lord ...". Because of the history of the apostle Paul's frequent imprisonments, we might tend to take this self-characterization literally, limiting it to his actual times in jail. But those actual imprisonments stand as tangible consequences of a much deeper relationship involving captivity in Paul's life. That relation had a prehistory in the young Saul's role as a Pharisee in persecuting and trying to root out the adherents of a new sect centered on Jesus of Nazareth who they took to be the Messiah. That relation took a decisive turn on the road to Damascus. The risen Christ captured Saul on that day, and in that captivation Paul found perfect freedom. (Acts 9)

In being captured by Christ, Paul was freed from bondage to lesser gods. Vocation is our call to an allegiance - a captivity, a captivation, if you will - that frees us for our deepest service and our most creative investment of ourselves. Here we are in touch with the paradox of a captivity - a captivation, if you will - that leads to freedom.

3. Now, a third paradox has to do with our lives in religious communities: how we become individuals through our participation in communities. For now we can state it this way: It is through learning to stand each other in church that we are fitted for partnership with God in our vocations. This awakening to vocation, the forming, shaping and integration of an identity that includes our relatedness and responsiveness to God, can never be simply an individual achievement.

In church, when it is church, we are among friends who know and shape their lives within the Christian story. In interacting and struggling with them and in trying to discern with them what God calls us to be and do, we awaken, begin to form, and launch out in the risks of vocation. In church, when it is church, we find support, strengthening and accountability in our pilgrimages in vocation. Paradoxically, we become true individuals in relation to God and the neighbor, through community.

4. Now we come to a fourth paradox. This must be seen in relation to our common understanding of self-denial as being close to the heart of discipleship. "If any one will come after me, let that person deny the self, take up the cross, and follow me." For centuries that passage, and others like it, have led Christians to assume that to follow Christ, to be in partnership with God, necessarily goes against our natural inclinations and desires. We have been taught that our natural wills and dispositions are corrupt and selfish. Through heavy stress on the doctrine of original sin we have had hammered into us that we are inevitably "totally depraved" and that "there is no health in us." Thus, in thinking about how we might align ourselves with the purposes of God, we probably assume that our own desires and longings must be negated if we are to be faithful.

Now, to be sure, there are times and circumstances when following God's call puts us into danger, hardship, or even requires our death. A Steve Biko, who died of torture at the hands of South African police because of his commitment to liberation for his people, haunts my mind. The judges who died in Colombia, South America, because of their commitment to exercising the legal process to imprison drug lords gives us such examples. Yet, at a deeper level, we may say of these persons - and of millions of others - that though their commitments and activities have brought them suffering and death, in those commitments they were pursuing what they most deeply and truly wanted to be doing, what they were most deeply and truly *called* to be doing.

The fourth of those wonderful interviews of Joseph Campbell by Bill Moyers is titled, "Sacrifice and Bliss." There Campbell talks about vocation, and how what God wants for us and from us is connected to what we most deeply and truly want for ourselves.

Moyers asked Campbell how he found his special calling in life. Campbell answered that he discovered as a young man three great terms in the Sanskrit language, which he says is the language of spirituality, *par excellence*. The first term is *Sat*, which means "Being", ultimate Being, and our participation in it. And then there's *Chit*, which means "consciousness", awareness. And then there is the term *Ananda*, which means "bliss or rapture". Campbell said, "I thought as a young man, I don't know whether my consciousness is proper consciousness or not; I don't know whether what I know of my being is my proper being or not; but I do know where my rapture is, where my bliss lies, so let me hang on to rapture, and that will bring me to both my consciousness and my being." Campbell was then in his eighties and facing death from throat cancer, but he said with a twinkle in his eye, "I think it worked."

Moyers then asked Campbell how one finds one's bliss. Campbell answered, in effect, that we find our bliss by following our own deepest gifts, our longings, and leadings. Then he referred to Sinclair Lewis's novel, *Babbitt*, and pointed to the last line of the novel. There Babbitt speaks and says: "I have never done the thing that I wanted to do in all my life." Campbell says, "That is a man that has never followed his bliss." And then he tells the story: Before he was married he had already begun his teaching career at Sarah Lawrence. He ate out virtually every night. One Thursday night in his favorite Greek restaurant, he saw a mother and a father and son, about age 12, sitting at the table next to his. He couldn't help overhearing the conversation. He heard the father say, "Drink your tomato juice." The boy said, "I don't want to drink my tomato juice." The father then said more loudly, "Drink your tomato juice!" And the mother says, "Don't make him do what he doesn't want to do!" And the father says, "He can't go through life doing what he wants to do - if he does what he wants to do, he'll be dead! Look at me - I've never done a thing I wanted to do in all my life!" And Campbell said, "And I thought, my God, there's Babbitt incarnate!"

Then Moyers follows up by asking, "What happens when you follow your bliss?" And Campbell says, "You come to bliss." He continues, "In the middle ages, a favorite image that occurs in many, many contexts is the wheel of fortune. There's the hub of the wheel, and there's the revolving rim of the wheel. For example, if you're attached to the rim of the wheel of fortune, you will either be above, going down, or on the bottom, struggling to come up. And you'll never know where you'll be on that revolving wheel. But", Campbell said, "if you're at the hub - and in the picture they use to illustrate this, the hub comes out of the heart of the person - if you're at the hub of the wheel, you're in the same place all of the time." And then Campbell immediately illustrated his point by talking about marriage. He says, "That's the sense of the marriage vow. I take you in health or sickness; in wealth or poverty; going up or going down. I take you as my center and you are my bliss - not the wealth that you might bring me, not social prestige, but you. That," he says, "is following your bliss."

When Campbell taught in a boys' prep school he would talk to the boys who were trying to make up their minds as to what their careers were going to be. "Do you think I can be a writer?" a boy would ask, and Campbell would say, "Oh, I don't know - can you endure ten years of disappointment, with no one responding to you? Or are you thinking that you're going to write a best-seller at the very first crack? If you have the guts to stay with the thing that you really want, no matter what happens, well, go ahead."

But then Dad would come along, he said, and say, "No, you ought to study law, because there's more money in that, you know." "Now, that," said Campbell, "is the rim of the wheel, not the hub, not following your bliss. Are you going to think of your fortune, or are you going to think of your bliss?"

Understood deeply enough, Joseph Campbell's advice is of a piece with St. Augustine's counsel to: "Love God and do what you will." The preacher, novelist and essayist, Frederick Buechner, put the same idea in more Biblical and Christian terms. And I quote:

"Vocation comes from the Latin *vocare*, "to call", and it means the work one is called to by God. There are all different kinds of voices calling you to do all different kinds of work, and the problem is to find out which is the voice of God, rather than that of society, or the superego, or self-interest. By and large, a good rule for finding this out is the following: the kind of work God usually calls you to do is the kind of work (a) that you need most to do, and (b) that the world needs most to have done. If you really get a kick out of your work, you've presumably met requirement (a), but if your work is writing deodorant commercials, the chances may be that you've missed requirement (b). On the other hand, if your work is being a doctor in a leper colony, you've probably met requirement (b), but if most of the time you're bored and depressed by your work, the chances are you've not only bypassed (a), but you probably aren't helping your patients much, either." Then he says, "Neither the hair shirt nor the soft birth will do. The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

"The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

Vocation: Finding a purpose for your life that is part of the purposes of God. "I, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you therefore to lead a life worthy of the vocation to which you were called."

Amen.

http://www.30goodminutes.org/csec/sermon/fowler_3914.htm

“Beyond Individuation To Discipleship: A Directory For Those Who Give The Spiritual Exercises” by George J. Schemel, S.J. in collaboration with Judith A. Roemer

Chapter 1 – Overview and Introduction

Identity → Vocation → Mission → Name of Grace

There are many skills and various types of knowledge that a director has to have in giving spiritual direction or in directing an eight-day or thirty-day retreat of *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*. This book cannot adequately train a person to be a director of *The Spiritual Exercises*; but it can be a great resource, especially since it is designed to help the director, as director. Many things are coming out these days on *The Spiritual Exercises*, but they do not especially help the director. They go along with the opinion of a few (even in high places!) that almost anyone can give *The Spiritual Exercises*. This is not true.

We hope to give a good understanding of the content, the structure, and the dynamics of *The Spiritual Exercises*. We will give some general indications of the direction of the retreat of *The Spiritual Exercises* and discuss ways to understanding its dynamics in terms of what we like to speak of as Identity → Vocation → Mission → Name of Grace. Then we will look at the deep sweep of the *Exercises*: Purification, Illumination, Confirmation, and Union.

A chart at this chapter's end called "The Approximate Duration of *The Spiritual Exercises*" alerts one to the fact that the time spent on any one part or dynamic corresponds to the need of the retreatant. The general sweep of *The Spiritual Exercises* gives a classical description of what happens when God enters into the life of the human person. Do things always happen that way? No, they do not. Do they generally happen that way? Yes, they do. Dynamics and patterns in spirituality are true "for the most part." They are not true in the same way as things are true in physics, chemistry, or mathematics where things are more predictable and consistent. The human person is far too rich for that. Dynamics and patterns in spirituality are true for the most part.

The Spiritual Exercises give a classical description. They give one pegs to hang things on and ways to understand how a person responds when God enters into his or her life.

The Spiritual Exercises are structured this way: Purification → Illumination → Confirmation → Union. It is important to note, however, that prior to **The Spiritual Exercises** as they appear in the book of **The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius**, there is a presupposition that the retreatant knows that he or she is thoroughly loved by God. This love is personal, individual, and by name. The person must know that God loves him or her in any hypothesis -- even the hypothesis of serious sin. God loves them. **The Spiritual Exercises** should not be attempted unless a person knows this. At the beginning of the 30-day **Exercises** one spends perhaps three days instructing the person to pray on God's love for him or her, using various passages of Scripture, such as Isaiah [43:1-11], Isaiah [49:15], Romans [8:31], where God tells us of God's love. The person has to be grounded in God's love or else he or she cannot really face his or her sinfulness. It is too scary. It is too embarrassing. It is too difficult. This is the first real movement.

Some people consider the first movement to be outside of the retreat, prior to coming to the retreat. It does not matter as long as there are three or four days on God's personal love for this individual and then a consideration of The Principle and Foundation [23]. When one comes into the First Week of the Exercises proper, the Week given to purification, that Week of purification may take five days more or less. The Weeks of the **Exercises** are not seven-day weeks, but they are "seasons of soul." The "week" is a metaphor.

After taking three or four days on God's personal love, one needs about five days for the First Week, the material of sin and sinfulness, so that the person knows himself or herself as forgiven, redeemed, and loved sinner. Generally, there would be nine days in the First Week. The tenth day is a day of repose.

The day of repose (often Day 10) is an integral part day of the retreat. It is a day when one does not carry on the four or five hours of prayer that are normally part of a regular retreat. It is a day of repose on which people might go shopping, visit with friends, go for a walk or a swim or some other relaxing activity. It does not mean that retreatants do not pray on that day. They do. They might pray a half hour in the morning and half hour in the evening, but the day of repose is a break from the intense prayer of the previous nine days.

In the Second Week of the **Exercises** we come into the illumination phase of our life with God. The Second Week of the **Exercises** is generally the longest of all the Four Weeks. It is ten days, perhaps even eleven days. The reason is that there is a good deal of work to be done in the Second Week. It is a week of illumination, and that means prayer over the life of Jesus. One prays over Jesus walking on the water, over Jesus saying, "Look at the lilies of the field, why are you so anxious... Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed as one of these...look at the sparrows of the air..." The Second Week includes the whole area of discernment and how to make decisions.

...we call Spiritual Exercises every way of preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of all inordinate attachments, and after their removal, of seeking and finding the will of God in the disposition of our life for the salvation of our soul. [1]

One is contemplating the events in the life of Christ, looking at the various ways to make decisions, and observing the times when good decisions can be made. These are all careful instruction for apostolic living.

The Second Week is a long week. It reminds us again that a Week is not seven days in **The Spiritual Exercises**. Here is a "week" of ten days, or perhaps eleven days. This Second Week is followed by another day of repose, a time to back off from the intensity of the prayer. This second day of repose would be about Day Twenty-one of the retreat.

After the First Week of purification and the Second Week of illumination, we come to the Third Week, in which the person is praying over the Passion of Our Lord. It is a week of confirmation about the decisions that have been made in the Second Week. These decisions about one's life and any other important decision will cause a person some suffering, some pain. We sometimes think that something is wrong if I am suffering, if I am in pain. That is not always so. If I make some important, serious decisions, and if I make them well, I will be in some pain, some suffering. The praying over the Passion in the Third Week, that week of confirmation, shows me the example of Jesus. It says, here is a splendid man, a splendid person, a God-Person, Who made some important decisions and suffered. There is nothing wrong with suffering or pain, nothing morally wrong. It just hurts.

We are not saying suffering and pain are good in themselves by any means. There is nothing wrong with pain and suffering when it is a consequence of making decisions and following them through. The Third Week helps me to be confirmed in my decisions. A person may think, "Yes, I am right, even though this is difficult, and I do not like it much. My decision is correct." We call that confirmation in suffering the Third Week.

The Third Week might last four or five days. Remember, the length of the time spent in any given Week is a judgment made between the director and the directee in the retreat. The retreat is guided by mutual conversation.

Then we pass into the Fourth Week, the week of praying over the Resurrection. It is a time of union. It is sometimes known as confirmation in joy. Remember:

purification → illumination → confirmation → union.

Some people question whether there should be a day of repose between the Third and Fourth Weeks. Some directors like to give a whole day of repose there; some only give a half day, some give none, some give two half days. It is a very delicate time in the retreat and a very delicate time for the retreatant. The timing is always dependent on the discernment between the director and directee.

Remember this is a directed retreat. The difference between a directed retreat and a retreat where someone preaches to fifty people is rather like the difference between a suit off the rack and a tailor-made suit. In the directed retreat the retreat comes out of the dialog between the director and the retreatant.

When one is giving an Annotation [19] retreat, the days allotted to each theme in the 30-day retreat will vary according to the director and directee's discretion and discernment.

Identity → Vocation → Mission → Name of Grace

Let us consider the dynamics of the retreat. You may find it helpful to refer to the diagram at the end of this chapter: Identity → Vocation → Mission → Name of Grace. This is one of the primary dynamics of The Spiritual Exercises.

It is important to note that the director in a directed retreat does not make decisions for the person making the retreat. The director does not make life decisions for them, does not get into their agenda or their content. The director directs the **process** of the retreat, not the content. The director steers away, very diligently, from making decisions for the retreatant. Ignatius says,

. . . the director of the Exercises, as a balance at equilibrium, without leaning to one side or the other, should permit the Creator to deal directly with the creature, and the creature directly with His Creator and Lord. [15]

The director keeps out of that line of fire. The director is like a cheerleader, a facilitator, always asking, "Have you looked at this... have you looked at that...maybe you need to consider this... what happened when you did that?" The director does not make the retreatant's decisions.

A retreat is a time to stop telling yourself your own story. Since the day you were born, your mother, father, maybe the teachers at school, the priests, readings, homilies in the liturgies, the policeman on the corner, everybody, without your even asking, will tell you who you are and what you should be. They will tell you your story. Before long a person begins to believe these stories. Unknowingly we say, "This is my story. This is who I am." A retreat, especially a directed retreat, is a time to stop telling yourself your own story and to go through this process of Identity → Vocation → Mission → Name of Grace to find your real story. The reason why you stop telling yourself your story is because you want God to tell you your story.

Only God knows your true story. Do not let anyone ever tell you the story of who you are and what your identity is. God knows your identity. God gave it to you. Listen to your story only from God.

We get our identity, who we are as a faith-grace person, in the presence of the Word of God, the listening presence to the Word of God. It is true our mother and father tell us about God and that is part of the "word;" and our aunts and our uncles tell us, and we go to school and the Sisters tell us, or we have Bible-study classes, or a picture book that tries to tell us our story. All those early experiences come into it. Then one day we say, " This is who I really am before God. I believe now, not because my mother does, or my father, or my family, but I believe."

It is an important time when one understands his or her story from God's perspective. It is as if God enters into the person's life and says, "Listen" This is not a whispering in the ear. It is a realization coming from one's presence to the Word of God. It is a realization of God's breaking into one's life This is vocation, a calling. Identity → Vocation → Mission → Name of Grace. God wants us to go on mission, to help Him build the kingdom.

The process begins with identity: Who am I as a faith-grace person? Then comes vocation, a calling. When we speak of "vocation," we are not necessarily talking about religious vocation or vocation to the priesthood. God calls everyone to holiness. He says, "You, Come. Come here." When God calls, God often in Scripture symbolizes the call by changing the person's name: Abram becomes Abraham; Saul becomes Paul; Simon Bar-Jona becomes Cephas, the Rock. There is a change in name. God calls us by our name. He says in Isaiah 43, "I have called you by your name, you are mine." Our response is, "Here I am. Send me."

To follow that call we may have to walk "through cities and towns and villages." We are going around that heuristic circle: Identity → Vocation → Mission → Name of Grace. Vocation also has about it the notion of "with others," in communion with whom? Who are going to be my companions, my friends, my colleagues? Vocation always has the notion of contextualizing how one's life is going to be lived out, with what people, where, and with what concerns. That is part of vocation. We follow that vocation, and the vocation becomes mission. Our walking through "cities and towns and villages" to follow calling or vocation is the mission.

The notion of mission can profit from some explicit reflection. In the church of the Gesu of the Society of Jesus in Rome is a marvelous picture of St. Francis Xavier kneeling at the feet of St. Ignatius. Ignatius is pointing off to the far reaches of the Indies and saying, "Go and set everything on fire." ***Ite incendite et flammate omnia***. Notice it is in the plural. Ignatius is saying it to Francis and to the Holy Spirit. That makes great art: ***Go and set everything on fire! Set everything on fire.*** It is great art, but it is poor theology.

Mission is never "Go"; mission is always "Come". God never says to anyone, "I am here. You, go there." God says, "I am here. Come here, of course." Those persons who live under obedience or who are the superiors of those who live under obedience should take note of the theology of mission. Mission is never "Go"; it is always "Come".

For true obedience there has to be a dialogue so that the one who gives the mission is content and the one who is missioned is content that he or she is going where he or she can find God and is called by God. One does not go where one cannot find God. Someone who is going to the inner city to bring God to the inner city had better not go. If they do not know that God has been there in the inner city for hundreds of years before they ever thought of it, they should not go. If they are going to meet God there, that is fine. The same is true for someone going to the foreign missions. If someone is going to the foreign missions to bring God to some God-forsaken place, he or she had better not go. There is no God-forsaken place! God has been there for hundreds and thousands of years before anyone ever got the idea of going there "on mission."

The discerning dialogue between, for instance, a superior and a person-to-be-sent has to uncover the presence of God there; and both have to have possession of that grace, that ability to find that God is there for me.

In the process of Identity → Vocation → Mission often one of those aspects of our life with God will shine very brightly and throw light on the other two. Sometimes one or the other or two of them will be dim. I may not really know what my vocation is nor do I know what my mission is, but my identity is shining very brightly and casting light on vocation and mission. Sometimes the mission will be very bright and the identity will have grown dim and vocation may have grown dim also. Mission will cast light on identity and vocation. One would call that a heuristic circle. Identity → Vocation → Mission → Name of Grace. As we go around that cycle many times, we go around our life: Identity → Vocation → Mission → Identity → Vocation → Mission → Identity → Vocation → Mission.

We learn things and gain insight as we go through this cycle several times. We begin to know and become aware of our Name of Grace. Who are you as a faith-grace person? What is your Name of Grace? All have a very specific, unique and individual Name of Grace. God has dealt with no one ever before, nor will God ever again deal with anyone, in precisely the same way that God deals with you. You have your very personal, individual, unique relationship with God. God calls you by your name. "I have called you by your name." [Isa 43:1] That name is not just Thomas, or George or Mary or Susan. That name is an ontological calling: being called into existence, into relationship with God.

We have some very good examples of this First Name of Grace in history. St. Francis of Assisi, for instance, "**Il Poverello**, God's Little Poor Man," a very specific name of grace. That is what Francis was to reflect to the world: that aspect of God that could somehow be symbolized by Francis being **Il Poverello**, God's Little Poor Man. St. Therese of Lisieux, the Little Way, is another very discernible name of grace. The Little Way was St. Therese's way, her name of grace, her identity and vocation and mission.

A very interesting name of grace is that of St. Robert Cardinal Bellarmine, a priest of the Society of Jesus. He was not just a very brilliant man, but also a true genius. The Pope wanted him to become a cardinal. The Society of Jesus said, "No, we would rather not." The Pope said, "Yes, yes" and the Society said, "No, we would rather not." Finally, the Pope put his foot down and said, "He will be a cardinal. The Church of God has not his like in learning. He will be a cardinal." And so it came to pass. He became a cardinal. As cardinal this very brilliant man, a man of genius, had a palace. He had a coach and four to take him around Rome. He ate good meals. He had butlers and housemaids and cooks; and he had quite an extensive personal library, which was quite unusual for that time. Books were enormously expensive; most of them still scribed. He moved in a certain echelon of society because he was a cardinal.

Things that were fitting for St. Robert Cardinal Bellarmine would not at all be fitting for Il Poverello, God's Little Poor Man. Robert and Francis knew that. Certain things did not fit their name of grace. Francis slept on a mat. Robert Bellarmine slept in a palace in a nice bed. Francis ate what he could beg. Robert Cardinal Bellarmine had good meals prepared for him. If it were today, Robert Cardinal Bellarmine would have a Cadillac; and Francis, God's Little Poor Man, would have a bicycle.

It was not just with material things that their lives were very different. Bellarmine was a truly learned man of genius; Francis of Assisi, possibly could not read or write. He was certainly not a learned man. Certain things were fitting to their name of grace: the way they prayed, the way they thought, the way they talked and so on. They came to know their name of grace. Francis could tell immediately that the coach and four did not fit his name of grace. Bellarmine could say, "Yes, I have to have my library. That fits my Name of Grace. Both were great saints; yet both were very different. Different though their lives were, they were both great saints because they were faithful to their Name of Grace. To come to know one's Name of Grace is the purpose of the Ignatian retreat: To consider sin, God, Christ's life and my life, the Passion and the Resurrection, and what is going on with me. Why? Ignatian retreat is about apostolic spirituality.

Apostolic spirituality is a spirituality of choice at the level of faith, a spirituality of decision-making. To make good decisions we have the process of discernment. Of course, it has become popular today to discern everything under the sun. Once Abraham Lincoln asked his Cabinet, "How many legs does a sheep have if you count the tail as a leg?" Many of the cabinet said, "Five." Lincoln said, "No, four. Counting the tail as a leg does not make it a leg." In like manner there are many things going by the name of discernment that are not discernment. Discernment is a very specific process and has a very specific quality and attitude.

Discernment is an experiential knowledge of self in the congruence of the object of choice with one's fundamental religious orientation.

Let us unpack that phrase. It is an experiential knowledge of self. It is not head knowledge, a conceptual knowledge, but it is an experience, as the Scriptures mean knowledge when it says, "a man KNEW his wife." He had a deep experience of his wife. An experiential knowledge of self may be comparable to what a woman goes through when she is going to a dinner-dance. She opens her closet, looks the dresses over, and says, "It is that one." She knows. That is what fits. It reminds me of an ad I saw in Vogue one time. It said, "It is you and it is now." That is experiential knowledge.

Thus we have an experiential knowledge of self in the congruence of the object of choice, whatever that object of choice is. Should I get a doctorate in Archaeology? Am I too active or too passive in prayer? Should I move in with my mother or get my own apartment? Whatever the choice to be made is, it must be congruent with my fundamental religious orientation.

My fundamental religious orientation is my Name of Grace. My decision fits with my Name of Grace. It is "an experiential knowledge of self in the congruence of the object of choice with my fundamental religious orientation." The decision and how I understand myself before God fit. They come together. I am comfortable with it. My head, my heart and my faith are saying the same thing. It is energizing.

The whole purpose of the retreat is to plumb that Name of Grace, to know that Name of Grace, and to raise it to the level of insight and usability.

We have a last name of grace as well as a first name of grace. The last name of grace is a family name of grace or a surname of grace. Our first name of grace is a very specific, particular, unique, individual name of grace; and the last name of grace is something that we share with others. For instance, I have three brothers. One is a Jesuit priest. If you saw us together you would say, "Oh, there are the Schemel boys. They have certain mannerisms: the way they talk, the way they walk and so on."

However, if you get to know us, you would say, "Oh, they are very different though." We have the same family characteristics; yet we are definite individuals. We have the same last name, but we have very different first names.

I have said before the purpose of the retreat is to bring to the level of insight and usability that first and last name of grace. I use it to make good decisions. I can say, "This decision fits with my Name of Grace." It fits with my first name of grace, my unique individuality. It fits with my last name of grace that has something to do with that vocation grace: "in solidarity with whom," with what people, with what colleagues, in what context.

One may never get to where one can say one's name of grace in twenty- five words or less, but one gets a sense of it and a sense of how to make these decisions: discernment is an experiential knowledge of self in the congruence of the object of choice with my Name of Grace or my fundamental religious orientation. The retreat is about learning your first and last Name of Grace, to raise the Name of Grace to consciousness, to see how God is calling, identifying and missioning me.

http://www.isecp.org/chapt_1.html

“Now I Become Myself” by *Parker Palmer*. Excerpted from ‘Let Your Life Speak: Listening to the Voice of Vocation’, *John Wiley & Sons, 2000*.

How do you find the *right* work, the work that you alone are called to do? The first step is to ask a different question...

What a long time it can take to become the person one has always been. How often in the process we mask ourselves in faces that are not our own. How much dissolving and shaking of ego we must endure before we discover our deep identity — the true self within every human being that is the seed of authentic vocation.

I first learned about vocation growing up in the church. I value much about the religious tradition in which I was raised: its humility about its own convictions, its respect for the world's diversity, its concern for justice. But the idea of vocation I picked up in those circles created distortion until I grew strong enough to discard it. I mean the idea that vocation, or calling, comes from a voice external to ourselves, a voice of moral demand that asks us to become someone we are not yet — someone different, someone better, someone just beyond our reach.

That concept of vocation is rooted in a deep distrust of selfhood, in the belief that the sinful self will always be “selfish” unless corrected by external forces of virtue. It is a notion that made me feel inadequate to the task of living my own life, creating guilt about the distance between who I was and who I was supposed to be, leaving me exhausted as I labored to close the gap.

Today I understand vocation quite differently — not as a goal to be achieved but as a gift to be received. Discovering vocation does not mean scrambling toward some prize just beyond my reach but accepting the treasure of true self I already possess. Vocation does not come from a voice “out there” calling me to become something I am not. It comes from a voice “in here” calling me to be the person I was born to be, to fulfill the original selfhood given me at birth by God.

The birthright gift

It is a strange gift, this birthright gift of self. Accepting it turns out to be even more demanding than attempting to become someone else. I have sometimes responded to that demand by ignoring the gift, or hiding it, or fleeing from it, or squandering it — and I think I am not alone. There is a Hasidic tale that reveals, with amazing brevity, both the universal tendency to want to be someone else and the ultimate

importance of becoming one's self: Rabbi Zusya, when he was an old man, said, "In the coming world, they will not ask me: 'Why were you not Moses?' They will ask me: 'Why were you not Zusya?'"

We arrive in this world with birthright gifts — then we spend the first half of our lives abandoning them or letting others disabuse us of them. As young people, we are surrounded by expectations that may have little to do with who we really are, expectations held by people who are not trying to discern our selfhood but to fit us into slots. In families, schools, workplaces, and religious communities, we are trained away from true self toward images of acceptability; under social pressures like racism and sexism our original shape is deformed beyond recognition; and we ourselves, driven by fear, too often betray true self to gain the approval of others.

We are disabused of original giftedness in the first half of our lives. Then — if we are awake, aware, and able to admit our loss — we spend the second half trying to recover and reclaim the gift we once possessed.

Wearing other people's faces

When we lose track of true self, how can we pick up the trail? One way is to seek clues in stories from our younger years, years when we lived closer to our birthright gifts. A few years ago, I found some clues to myself in a time machine of sorts. A friend sent me a tattered copy of my high school newspaper from May 1957 in which I had been interviewed about what I intended to do with my life. With the certainty to be expected of a high school senior, I told the interviewer that I would become a naval aviator and then take up a career in advertising.

I was indeed "wearing other people's faces," and I can tell you exactly whose they were. My father worked with a man who had once been a navy pilot. He was Irish, charismatic, romantic, full of the wild blue yonder and a fair share of the blarney, and I wanted to be like him. The father of one of my boyhood friends was in advertising, and though I did not yearn to take on his persona, which was too buttoned-down for my taste, I did yearn for the fast car and other large toys that seemed to be the accessories of his selfhood.

These self-prophecies, now over forty years old, seem wildly misguided for a person who eventually became a Quaker, a would-be pacifist, a writer, and an activist. Taken literally, they illustrate how early in life we can lose track of who we are. But inspected through the lens of paradox, my desire to become an aviator and an advertiser contain clues to the core of true self that would take many years to emerge: clues, by definition, are coded and must be deciphered.

Hidden in my desire to become an "ad man" was a lifelong fascination with language and its power to persuade, the same fascination that has kept me writing incessantly for decades. Hidden in my desire to become a naval aviator was something more complex: a personal engagement with the problem of violence that expressed itself at first in military fantasies and then, over a period of many years, resolved itself in the pacifism I aspire to today. When I flip the coin of identity I held to so tightly in high school, I find the paradoxical "opposite" that emerged as the years went by.

If I go farther back, to an earlier stage of my life, the clues need less deciphering to yield insight into my birthright gifts and callings. In grade school I became fascinated with the mysteries of flight. As many boys did in those days, I spent endless hours, after school and on weekends, designing, crafting, flying, and (usually) crashing model airplanes made of fragile balsa wood.

Unlike most boys, however, I also spent long hours creating eight- and twelve-page books about aviation. I would turn a sheet of paper sideways, draw a vertical line down the middle, make diagrams of, say, the cross-section of a wing, roll the sheet into a typewriter, and peck out a caption explaining how the air moving across an airfoil creates a vacuum that lifts the plane. Then I would fold that sheet in half along with several others I had made, staple the collection together down the spine, and painstakingly illustrate the cover.

I had always thought that the meaning of this paperwork was obvious: fascinated with flight, I wanted to be a pilot, or at least an aeronautical engineer. But recently, when I found a couple of these literary artifacts in an old cardboard box, I suddenly saw the truth, and it was more obvious than I had imagined. I didn't want to be a pilot or an aeronautical engineer or anything else related to aviation. I wanted to be an author, to make books — a task I have been attempting from the third grade to this very moment.

From the beginning, our lives lay down clues to selfhood and vocation, though the clues may be hard to decode. But trying to interpret them is profoundly worthwhile — especially when we are in our twenties or thirties or forties, feeling profoundly lost, having wandered, or been dragged, far away from our birthright gifts.

Those clues are helpful in counteracting the conventional concept of vocation, which insists that our lives must be driven by “oughts.” As noble as that may sound, we do not find our callings by conforming ourselves to some abstract moral code. We find our callings by claiming authentic selfhood, by being who we are, by dwelling in the world as Zusya rather than straining to be Moses. The deepest vocational question is not “What ought I to do with my life?” It is the more elemental and demanding “Who am I? What is my nature?”

Everything in the universe has a nature, which means limits as well as potentials, a truth well known by people who work daily with the things of the world. Making pottery, for example, involves more than telling the clay what to become. The clay presses back on the potter's hands, telling her what it can and cannot do — and if she fails to listen, the outcome will be both frail and ungainly. Engineering involves more than telling materials what they must do. If the engineer does not honor the nature of the steel or the wood or the stone, his or her failure will go well beyond aesthetics: the bridge or the building will collapse and put human life in peril.

The human self also has a nature, limits as well as potentials. If you seek vocation without understanding the material you are working with, what you build with your life will be ungainly and may well put lives in peril, your own and some of those around you. “Faking it” in the service of high values is no virtue and has nothing to do with vocation. It is an ignorant, sometimes arrogant, attempt to override one's nature, and it will always fail.

Joining self and service

Our deepest calling is to grow into our own authentic selfhood, whether or not it conforms to some image of who we ought to be. As we do so, we will not only find the joy that every human being seeks — we will also find our path of authentic service in the world. True vocation joins self and service, as Frederick Buechner asserts when he defines vocation as “the place where your deep gladness meets the world's deep need.”

Buechner's definition starts with the self and moves toward the needs of the world: it begins, wisely, where vocation begins — not in what the world needs (which is everything), but in the nature of the human self, in what brings the self joy, the deep joy of knowing that we are here on earth to be the gifts that God created.

Contrary to the conventions of our thinly moralistic culture, this emphasis on gladness and selfhood is not selfish. The Quaker teacher Douglas Steere was fond of saying that the ancient human question “Who am I?” leads inevitably to the equally important question “Whose am I?” — for there is no selfhood outside relationship. We must ask the question of selfhood and answer it as honestly as we can, no matter where it takes us. Only as we do so can we discover the community of our lives.

As I learn more about the seed of true self that was planted when I was born, I also learn more about the ecosystem in which I was planted — the network of communal relations in which I am called to live responsively, accountably, and joyfully with beings of every sort. Only when I know both seed and system, self and community, can I embody the great commandment to love both my neighbor and myself.

There are at least two ways to understand the link between selfhood and service. One is offered by the poet Rumi in his piercing observation: "If you are here unfaithfully with us, you're causing terrible damage." If we are unfaithful to true self, we will extract a price from others. We will make promises we cannot keep, build houses from flimsy stuff, conjure dreams that devolve into nightmares, and other people will suffer — if we are unfaithful to true self.

<http://www.futurenet.org/article.asp?id=419>

Sermon Archive - January 11, 2004 -- Baptism of Our Lord by Pastor Richard Holmer

First Reading : Isaiah 43:1-7

Second Reading : Acts 8:14 -17

Gospel: Luke 3:15-17, 21-22 **Called To Be Christian**

Whether it's cashing a check or traveling by airplane, from time to time we are called on to establish our identity – to prove who we are. It's an interesting philosophical proposition: how to prove that you are really you. I recall an episode on Seinfeld when Kramer went to pick up some tickets at the will-call window. The ticket agent asks to see some I.D., and Kramer discovers he has left his wallet at home. Then, in a moment of inspiration, he strikes a pose in profile and says, "Tell me I'm not Kramer!" But the clerk isn't persuaded.

We need official documentation to verify our identity: Birth Certificate, Passport, driver's license, social security card. You can take it a step further and give your fingerprint – or the new ultimate in identification: a DNA sample.

So we do have ways of demonstrating to others who we truly are. Then there is a deeper question: How do you know who you are? How do you determine your own identity – beyond an I.D. card that has your name on it? How do we respond when someone says to us: "Tell me about yourself"?

Almost always we begin by speaking of what we do. We offer an oral resume; We say: I'm a teacher, I'm a doctor, I'm a carpenter, I'm an accountant, I'm a farmer, I'm a student, I'm an actor, I'm a journalist, I'm a pastor. We talk about what we do, where we do it, how long we've been doing it.

But what if, when asked to tell something about ourselves, our first response was to say: "I'm a Christian"? Now maybe we don't say this because we think we're not supposed to talk about our faith – it's personal and private. Or maybe we feel that being Christian is not something you do, just what you are (like being of Swedish ancestry or having an O+ blood type). Yet identity and vocation are directly linked. Who we are and what we do cannot be neatly separated. I'm a professor and so I teach. I'm a truck driver because I drive trucks. I'm a carpenter and so I build things. I'm a student and so I study. I have children and so I am a father.

Am I a mechanic if I don't fix anything? Am I still a cowboy if I don't ride the range? Am I a mother after all the kids grow up and move on with their lives?

Anna Quindlen piece on motherhood - "The end result is that the empty nest is emptier than ever before; after all, at its center was a role, a vocation, a nameless something so enormous that a good deal had to be sacrificed for it, whether sleep or self or money or ambition or peace of mind. Those sacrifices became the warp and woof of our lives; first we got used to them and then before we knew it they had become obsolete. Those of you waiting for your babies to sleep through the night will be amazed how quickly they come to sleep through the afternoon after a night out."

To be a Christian is to have both an identity and a vocation. Our identity defines our vocation. The name Christian tells us who we are and what we are to do.

Some seem to think that “Christian” is simply a label you slap on, a box to be checked on a form: religionChristian. Some are quick to tell what you don't have to do to be a Christian: You don't have to go to worship, you don't have to pray, you don't have to give money, you don't have to volunteer.

Think for a moment about what it means to be an American. Most of us are Americans by virtue of our birth – we didn't have to do anything. Citizenship is our birthright – but we sell it way short if we assume that this identity brings with it no responsibility, that we have nothing to do. To be an American involves believing in freedom, justice and democracy. It means being loyal to your country, voting in elections, paying taxes, obeying laws, expressing your opinion and honoring the rights of others. Our nation is in trouble when no one feels obliged to do anything as an American.

Christian is who we are, by virtue of our baptism into Christ. For most of us, baptism happened when we were infants. So our identity is not something we chose, it was given to us. Christian is who we are: children of God, disciples of Christ, forgiven sinners. Along with this identity comes a vocation: who we are shapes what we do.

Remember the words the congregation speaks when a person is baptized: we welcome you into the Lord's family. We receive you as a fellow member of the body of Christ, a child of the same heavenly Father, and A WORKER with us in the Kingdom of God . To be a child of God is also to be a worker in God's kingdom. So what do we have to do as Christians? What is our work? What is our vocation?

Job #1 is to believe. John 6:29, “Jesus said, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.’” Our first task is to trust the God who calls us to believe the promise given to have faith in Jesus Christ. Faith is not something passive, it is active. Faith is a passion. We live by faith and we walk by faith. We don't simply stand pat, we go somewhere, we do stuff, we go forward boldly in the darkness.

Once we believe, then what? God calls us to be Christians – and God also calls us to follow Christ, to make disciples, to live the gospel. These are the words of our mission statement – and it's no accident that the key words are verbs, action words.

A few years back our church issued a call to discipleship, and encouraged congregations to promote seven basic faith practices. The very simple premise is that Christian faith takes practice. Here at St. James we have resolved to emphasize one of these faith practices each year. Last year the focus was worship, this year it is prayer. It has occurred to me that the faith practices mesh well with our mission statement.

Three fit under the heading of “Follow Christ” – worship, pray, study. All of these enable us to stay close, stay in touch, stay engaged. How can you follow a Lord you do not know? And how can you know Jesus if you don't worship, pray and study? You can't follow from a distance. These practices are not optional but essential because they bring us close to Christ.

Under the heading: “Make Disciples”, we can place: encourage and invite. The faith we have received is meant to be shared. We share with those close to us by offering simple and regular words of encouragement. Even when we know what is good and right, we need to be encouraged to do it – and to be appreciated when we do. And if this faith is truly meaningful and life giving for us, then we need to invite others to come and share it. No arm-twisting is required – a simple “Come and see” is sufficient.

And under “Live the Gospel” we find SERVE and GIVE. Like Jesus, our aim ought to be not to be served but to serve, to love neighbors as we love ourselves, to do justice and be merciful. To live is to give, because love is a give away. To live the gospel is to give as freely and as generously as God gives to us.

Who are you? I hope you can say with conviction: "I'm a Christian, a baptized child of God". It's an identity that can never be taken from you. Even if we forget God, God does not forget us.

Believe in God – and trust who God calls you to be: his beloved sons and daughters. Live a life worthy of your calling. Let "Christian" describe both who you are and what you do.

Amen

http://www.stjameslutheran.org/Sermons/sermon_01112004.html

"LIFE Amidst Temptation" First Sunday of Lent, February 29, 2004 -- First Presbyterian Church, Ypsilanti, MI by The Rev. Keith Geiselman, Pastor

Text: Luke 4:1-13

I was searching the aisles of the hardware store the other day for a tube of "DuPont Teflon" bearing grease, I couldn't find it, so I went up to the customer service desk to ask for help from the young man standing at the cash register. He was on the telephone and, when he saw me coming his direction, he turned his back toward me. I could tell he was making a personal call, but I just waited. The call went on and on ... "So did you like the movie ... really? ... Oh you're kidding! ... What did Susan say? ..." Finally I cleared my throat. He gave a sharp glance in my direction and kept on talking. "That Susan's fresh... Oh, I know, I hate that ... So, you going to the game Friday?"

I was now beginning to be impatient: "Excuse me," I said, "I have a quick question."

He let out a great sigh and mumbled into the phone, "Catch ya' later, Charlie, I gotta go." He looked at me with an exasperated expression that said, "Well, spit it out."

"I'm looking for 'DuPont Teflon Bearing Grease.'"

"It's *on* the third aisle, in plain view," he said with disdain. As I walked down the third aisle, the farther I went the angrier I got. How dare he treat me, a customer, so rudely?

I was tempted to go back up there and give him a piece of my mind!

I was *tempted* ... what does that mean?

Talking to my tablemate at the Brotherhood Banquet Friday, she said that the library needs content filters on the computers to protect the children from browsing pornography. With all the stuff out there... well, I trust my own kids, but I hesitate to place them under that kind of temptation."

I hesitate to place them under that kind of *temptation*... what does that mean?

The fellow next to me on the plane last February was filling out his expense report. I asked if he traveled a lot. He said, "Why yes, and for all the hassle, I ought to dummy up a receipt and submit it for just compensation.

"They have safe-guards, right?" I said.

He chuckled mischievously, "They're not very thorough, I'm tempted."

I'm *tempted* ... what does that mean?

Most of us think that if there is one thing we know about in life, it's temptation. If there's one theological word that does not need to be rescued from abstraction, that connects firmly and vividly to our everyday experience, "temptation" would be the one. We face temptation all the time. Temptation hangs in our environment like flu virus, always threatening to break down our resistance. We are tempted to break our diets, finesse the chemistry test, gossip about a friend, lie our way out of trouble ... you name it. We are always being tempted to do what we know we shouldn't do. We don't need any instruction about temptation. Temptation we know about.

But, do we really? Do we really know what temptation is? Today's lesson from the Gospel of Luke is a story about the nature of human temptation--Jesus' temptation and ours--and it throws a surprising light on what temptation really is.

What does it mean, really, to be *tempted*?

Our church school teacher told us one Sunday, "The best measure of a person is what you would do if you knew no one would ever find out." Recalling that remark now, it strikes me more like general worldly wisdom than Christian wisdom, perhaps, but it's a near miss. It gets close to Christian wisdom, because our teacher was telling us that, when you take away all the lust for reward and all the fear of punishment--no one will ever find out--**what you do in life grows out of who you understand yourself to be.** In other words, our Sunday school teacher was moving toward a profound gospel insight: Christian ethics grow out of Christian identity; the decisions we make in life are a product of who we understand ourselves to be.

In that light, we have a far too shallow view of temptation. In ordinary terms, we think of temptation as the urge to do something we really would like to do but know we shouldn't do--one more cigarette, one more fling, one more drink, one more juicy rumor. But the deepest temptation is not the urge to misbehave, to do what we know we shouldn't do, but rather the enticement to compromise our baptismal identity, **to be who we are not called to be.**

That's the message in this story of Jesus' temptation. The devil is not tempting Jesus to misbehave. He is not tempting Jesus to steal a wallet, or sneak a peek at the *Playboy* website, or cheat on his taxes, or pick a fight with his neighbor. It's deeper than that. The devil is tempting Jesus to ignore his baptism, to **deny** who he is, to **forget** that he is the child of his Father in heaven.

It is significant that Jesus comes to the temptation immediately from his baptism, when the skies opened and a voice from heaven said, "*You are my beloved Son, the one with whom I am well pleased.*" That's who he is. "*You are my beloved Son. You are the heir to the identity and mission of my people. You are my prophet, my priest, my anointed, my suffering servant. You are the one I am sending down the long and painful road to Jerusalem. You are the one I am calling to drink the bitter cup of sacrifice. You are the one I am delivering into the hands of those who will kill you. You are the one I am sending to bear the cross for the salvation of all people. You are the one to whom I am entrusting the promise of redemption. You are the one. You are my beloved Son, and I am well-pleased with you.*"

It is, then, when Jesus' vocation and identity are most clear that he comes to the season of his tempting. It is precisely Jesus' identity that the devil seeks to destroy. That, after all, is what temptation is all about. Notice how the tempter begins, "*If you are the Son of God ...*" He could have attacked directly: "You are *not* the Son of God," but he was too crafty for that. Much better to generate self-doubt--"*If you are the Son of God*"--since self-doubt is the cancer that eats away at identity.

The devil picks away, then, at Jesus' sonship, at his *baptismal identity*. The three temptations--to turn stones into bread, to throw himself down from the top of the temple and to worship the tempter--are not

enticements to *do* bad things; they are, at root, invitations to *be* somebody else, to live some life other than that of the beloved son of God.

Everything about the early chapters of Luke—from the appearance of the angel of God to the high priest Zachariah that opens the Gospel to the account of Jesus baptism—makes it plain that Jesus had been given a narrative to follow, a storied identity, the narrative of God's salvation. The devil wants him to change the script, to trade God's story for some other story. Notice that Jesus combats the devil's attack not with theological innovation, skillful counter-arguments, or clever repartee, but by citing the story, quoting each time scriptures from Deuteronomy that he was taught as a child. In other words, Jesus resists the devil's wiles by quoting the holy script. He will not change the script; he will not live a narrative other than the one he has been given; he remembers his baptism, and he knows who he is.

Because we belong to Jesus Christ, we, too, have been given a part in the story, a role to play in this holy drama of redemption. We have been called, called in our baptism to be God's beloved children. In a world where might makes right, we have been named ambassadors of reconciliation. It is our baptismal identity to be those who sow love where there is hatred, hope where there is despair, faith where there is doubt.

Because we are called, we are also tempted, tempted to change the script, tempted to live out another story, tempted to be someone other than who we are called to be. To yield to temptation is far more serious than to commit some transgression; to yield to temptation is to say, "I am not a child of God, and I will not take my part in God's drama of redemption.

In the midst of South Africa's struggle against *apartheid*, one of the most respected voices for racial harmony and human dignity has been that of Bishop Desmond Tutu. But even the closest colleagues of Tutu are sometimes distressed by the bishop's tolerance and moderation. They wish he would be more aggressive with his opponents. One of them said, "At his age you'd think he would have learned to hate a little more. But there is this problem with Tutu: he believes literally in the gospel." What he was saying, in effect, is that Tutu knows who he is, remembers his baptism. He knows the gospel story, and he will not change the script.

Allow me to share a story from our friend Christian Zebley that lives out the script. He writes: "My senior year in high school I had a small part in the senior play. Truthfully, it wasn't actually a part *in* the play—I was far too shy for that—it was a part off-stage. I was the sound effects person. When the script called for knocking at the door, I rapped two sticks together. When the phone was supposed to ring, I touched the wires together on the battery operated bell, watching carefully so that I would stop just as the actor picked up the receiver.

"We worked hard on that play. The director was a young woman who taught English at the school, a new addition to the faculty, and she poured herself into us and into the play. In the afternoons when school was out, she carefully coached all the actors on their lines and helped them get their timing right. She would then dash to get some fast food, returning to the school in the evenings for rehearsals. Afterwards, she would often stay late at night, working with us on the props and pitching in on the painting of the sets. Unselfishly she gave herself to this moment in our lives.

"Night after night we rehearsed, and on opening night, we were ready; we had the play down perfectly. The curtains opened; the house was packed with our families and friends; electricity was in the air.

"The first act was a dream. The play was a comedy, and every funny line evoked rich laughter from the audience. They were enjoying themselves, and we were, too. But in the second act, an actor forgot his lines. You could see on his face that he knew it was his turn to speak, but he could not find the words. The audience did not sense it yet, but the other actors and those of us off-stage did.

"What to do? Everybody was paralyzed as this unfortunate classmate squirmed and tried to remember what he was supposed to say. I was standing in the wings, next to the young teacher who was the director. She was leaning toward the stage, every ounce of energy aimed encouragingly toward the struggling kid on stage.

"The script in her hand, she was just about to whisper his line out to him, when suddenly he spoke. It was not the line in the script--in his anxiety, he just made something up--but he spoke. Not only that, what he said happened to be funny, and the audience roared with laughter. Everybody on stage relaxed; they had gotten past a bad spot and could now work past it. Unfortunately, though, the forgetful actor heard the laughter of the audience and liked it, so he made up another line. This, too, was funny, not as funny as the first line, but the audience chuckled. So, the actor made up another line, and another, and still another.

"The other actors were trying to respond to him, but they couldn't. He was out of control now, spinning off whatever came into his head. The play was disintegrating, lost. The audience had now figured it out, and what little laughter was left was nervous and mocking.

"I don't remember how we got out of it, how we finished the play, or even if we did. The memory that sticks in my mind is looking up to see the director, the young woman who had given night after night of her time to work with us and make us ready, this woman who had poured herself into this play for our benefit, standing in the wings, watching and crying."

Jesus was cast into the lead role in the drama of God's redemption, and the devil tempted him to change the script, put on the actor's mask, improvise on the character, deny who he was called to be. But Jesus knew who he was and he trusted his Father and he never changed the script. "It is written ... It is written ... God promised" Like Jesus, we who are part of the church have been baptized, and the words have been said about us, "You are a son of God ... you are a daughter of God." "You are a child of God." We, too, have been given our parts to play in the drama of God's redemption.

"Seek first the kingdom of God, pray without ceasing, repay no one evil for evil, feed my lambs, bear one another's burdens, be kind to one another, forgive one another, love your enemies, be merciful, even as your Father is merciful." Even now the tempter whispers in your ear, change the script, make up your own lines. Everything is at stake, and the one who has poured his life into preparing us is watching.

To God be the glory. Amen.

<http://www.fpcy.org/sermons/040229.htm>

