

Luke 4: 14-21

Jesus proclaims to his own people God's purpose for him...but they don't like it much do they...in fact they want to kill him here and now in his own hometown of Nazareth...welcome to the kingdom of man!

There's sometimes a tension, isn't there, between conforming to your "tribes standards" - Your family and group's rules, rituals and prejudices... or living into your own gifts, talents and passions...what God has in store for you! You have both a perceived purpose and then God's true purpose for your life.

See we all want to belong don't we...and we get this from an early age...to belong to a group...and that is to say "who is in" and "who is out".

Belonging is a very primal human need especially when we are first born...Humans are all very, very vulnerable, and we must literally rely on others and our community or we die.

As we grow, we then question our tribal expectations don't we ...during our teens we look for self-identity and our own purpose in the world...Where do I fit in...where do I belong...why am I here?

And some kids conform... and some kids rebel. This is when their internal drive is either in concert... or in conflict...with outside expectations of them.

It's easy in today's world to let circumstances dictate our sense of purpose and what it means to be truly alive...Selling out is when we quiet our own inner passions, in order to continue to belong to our groups...living authentically for some, might cause conflict or might even ostracize others from their groups...see that's where their self-worth is tied to...their Family, their Religion, their Country... whatever it may be.

Look at the courage it takes for someone to” come out” LGBTQ in a conservative religious family...look at the tension it causes when no flexibility or openness is granted...for some unfortunately the only way out is to leave their family...and in extreme instances they may choose to leave this world by relinquishing their own God gifted life...

For most of us, however, the danger in living an inauthentic life is that we live our life with no real joy and often with a sense of regret. We often ignore or push our passions way down deep... but this will always find ways to come out...sometimes in healthy ways and other times in not so healthy ways!

Some folks even imprint their failed path onto others. Often people will feel alive by vicariously living through others: their children, Reality TV, Athletes, Celebrities etc...to seek that which is crying so desperately inside themselves to come out...to be who they were created to be.

They mistakenly believe that their own lifeless existence can be recharged or energized by living through another’s accomplishments and lifestyles.

So what does it mean to use your gifts for God’s purpose? Know that where your passion meets the world’s need there you will always find God... when your purpose and God’s purpose line up there you will always experience true peace and true joy - shalom!

Unfortunately, many of us are often told by others or society to keep our passions in check. After all we all want to be well rounded and self-sufficient – independent of others... and the world.

We then tend to settle for mediocrity rather than focusing on our special gifts and talents. Paul uses the imagery of all of us being like a Body that has different parts that work together to make one, unified whole...which he calls The Body of Christ.

Is it the purpose of an ear to hear or an eye to see? And why would you tell an ear that it should see better? Or an eye that it should hear better?

Why not let the ear be the best ear that it can be? Isn't the body stronger if the eye sees well, and the ear hears well, and the hands touch, and the feet cover ground?

Well you get the point! A fish would seem like such a failure if it saw itself as a bird! In nature, things are always authentic in how they were created to be...but unlike them...we get to choose!

Now there's nothing wrong with conformity...but having too much conformity creates a one size fits all people. People doing a lot of things OK, rather than doing the thing they were designed to be GREAT at! In focusing on our weaknesses, we actually neutralize our strengths.

Look at our school systems today! Conformity is stressed, but what happens to a child when he or she was actually created to not conform? When my son started first grade the teachers said he had a problem...we had him tested and he was labeled as ADHD...do you know that label doesn't even exist for children in most parts of the world.

I took him to a leading children's hospital to be evaluated and the lead psychologist there explained that the ADHD child's brain actually functions differently...that the dopamine (the body's natural pleasure and reward system) is mapped differently and she stated that this goes back to Biblical times...namely shepherd's vs farming (think Cain and Abel)...

See there are people who like to take risks and break new ground and there are those who crave stability and security. Both are valued and both have purpose...all societies in fact need both types of people to thrive and evolve...both are needed to become the land of milk (shepherds) and honey (gardeners)!

Ironically God was partial to the risk takers...the shepherds... because they are the agents of change...But whether shepherd or gardener...in order to live into your purpose you should really look at how you were wired by the creator...and start from there.

Now that's not to say that we shouldn't explore other things and live life to the fullest, but we need to ultimately focus on those things that fuel our passions. The things that YOU were uniquely created to do.

And from there we are then created to be in community and connected to the DIVERSITY of others. Today we tend to surround ourselves with others who look and think just like us...today its liberals & conservative etc...

Again we are losing the synergy of what it means to live as spiritual beings in communion and inter-dependent upon one another.

Many of us don't "feel and experience" the spirit inside us...we experience a spiritual barrenness. Dr. Wayne Dyer said "we all have a song to sing, and none of us should leave here without singing it!"

God created us for JOY! So what brings you joy? And I don't mean that circumstantial temporary happiness that the world offers...I mean JOY... deep down in your bones. Where's your passion? And how has God equipped you uniquely to serve the world?

What is your purpose? You probably already know - somewhere deep inside you...you know. It may be hiding behind your fears...your wanting approval, belonging, the conflicting advice from society, your significant others, etc. – pulling you in many different directions!

But once you find your purpose everything falls into place, but don't think that the world... or even those around will support your choices... especially if they see drastic changes...they might make it difficult for you especially if you no longer conform to their ideals.

Remember...Where your Passions meet the world's needs there you will find God! It takes many different types of people and skills to come together to create a living and thriving community...we can live life together (Gr: symbolic) or divided (Gr: diabolic).

So in a world with such diversity how do we kingdom build? How do we recognize and support our differences while working together for a common purpose?

In ancient times an altar to God was symbolically constructed by using all different shapes and sizes of rocks to build...if you used the same size rocks it would collapse. The stones had to be meticulously placed by hand and individually fitted to make it perfectly stable (And no stones when building an altar were allowed to be shaped by tools...they all had to be natural)...So you had to use all shapes and sizes!

At Harn Megiddo you can still see a large 20' diameter circular altar made in this fashion sitting outside and exposed to the elements...It is built with many shapes and sizes of rocks and has no mortar...READY for this... it has been there for around 8000 years with 20 different civilizations having repaired and worshiped upon it...8000 years!

It takes all kinds of people to build the Kingdom of God...and as Paul says we are all different parts which makes up The ONE Body of Christ....

The focus and movement of God has always been to get us to live our lives connected with all of creation - connected to family and friends, connected to our church...and connected to the world. In order to live a purposeful life one must be connected in order to be whole (or Holy)! That is when we experience the peace, love and joy which passes all understanding.

Now many of us spend our whole lives trying to be self-sufficient and secure, only to learn at some point that there is no such thing. It's all an illusion.

Paul's description of the "Body of Christ" is so appropriate because from it we can glimpse a bigger picture and understand just how connected we all are.

When we see the tragedies of violence in our country, notice how the "broken" person is always isolated or "dis-connected" in some flawed way. See God created us to be in communion with one another to be whole.

When reading the Gospels, it becomes readily apparent that Jesus really didn't care much about social norms, governments, laws, or who was right or wrong, in or out. What He cared most about were relationships. He re-connected people to God and to one another; his whole ministry can be summed up in that effort.

So what brings you joy? Where is your fire? How has God uniquely equipped you? Your life my friends is a testimony to our creator. If you are filled with the Spirit, the very breath of God, then Christ will be made manifest in the world... through you!

For where your passion meets the world's need there you will always find God...I guarantee it!

Think about all those around you. At my old job there were people who just loved rolling up their sleeves and making things happen... but they always got restless at meetings. Then there were those who were very creative, wonderful at coming up with new ideas, but whose eyes would glaze over at spreadsheets. Many a brilliant technician is told to work on their "people skills" while natural-born leaders are sent off to acquire more technical skills...that don't work!

Don't settle for mediocrity... one size fits all people...you see that's independence...it's all about me...and in focusing on our weaknesses we actually neutralize our strengths when connected to others in the greater picture.

We all have different gifts and parts to play in building up the kingdom of God and when we work together for the common good WE become Christ for others in the world.

Paul then goes on to emphasize in his letter next week that regardless of our common purpose though, that in EVERYTHING we do...we must ALWAYS do it with love at its foundation. See love is the thing that holds it all together.

The formula for growth and change is simple. If we combine our passions, talents and gifts... with love and God at our center... and focus them on changing the world by truly serving one another WE CANNOT FAIL!

For we together become the "Body of Christ" in motion... acting in and through the world. This is what the church at its heart should always strive to be! It is amazing what can be accomplished when we ALL work together inspired by God and our imaginations!

For where our churches gifts and talents meets the world's needs... there we will meet and experience the very presence of our living God!

Your faithful servant,  
carmen