

The First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham

“And the Award Goes To ...”

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Isaiah 40:27-31; Acts 9:1-22

Last week, Amy shared her “call story” with us. And she’s right, it isn’t a story that “rocks your socks” or will make it to an award-winning film. But it was pure and it was real, and I took the Bible passage from 1 Corinthians that she read and taped it to my own mirror.

My call story has even less dramatic appeal. For seven years, I had this feeling, more like a pull really, that I was supposed to go to seminary. There were several reasons (good ones, I might add!) why this wasn’t a good idea.

Not only was I not Biblically well-read, we had been dealing with some very serious health issues within our family for the past several years, and it did not seem that they would be resolved anytime soon.

And, I wasn’t exactly a “spring chicken”... and I still needed to hold down a job and take care of my family.

One night my husband, Roger, said to me, “You’ve been talking about seminary for 7 years now, so how much longer has it been in there? You’re not getting any younger, you know.”

The next day I applied to seminary.

Not exactly an earth-moving story.

Now Saul’s story of conversion on the road to Damascus makes for great reading. Here is a man who has gone out of his way to persecute followers of The Way.

Suddenly he is blinded by a light from heaven, hears the voice of Jesus speaking to him, is healed by a previously unknown disciple, gets baptized, and becomes the most influential voice for Christianity other than Jesus himself.

Now this, this is good stuff!

This is the stuff of Oscar winning movies: persecution, calamity, miracle, and a complete life-change.

And the drama keeps going throughout Saul’s (now known as Paul) story. He himself suffers great persecution for this personal about-face, yet goes on to proclaim the gospel and spread the word of Christ until his death.

Most scholars agree that without Paul’s influence, the religion known as Christianity would not have lasted, or be nearly as widespread, as it is today.

So... the “award goes to”... Paul.

But what about the others... those who were instrumental and dedicated to following Jesus? Those who

we know little about, or don't know at all?

Those who had supporting roles, bit parts, or just walk-on scenes?

What about Ananias? In Scripture, Ananias is mentioned a grand total of two times- -both in the book of Acts. Little is known of Ananias other than he lived in Damascus, was a Jewish disciple, and was held in high regard. Yet the Lord chose him as the instrument which led to the conversion of Saul.

Ananias trusted and followed the Lord's instructions, even though it obviously seemed impractical and dangerous...

And so... "the award goes to"... Ananias.

What about these people chosen by God? Why them? In many ways, they are unlikely candidates.

Ananias may have been well respected, but he's only mentioned twice in Scripture, and without many words at that. What made him so special as to be chosen by God?

And even Paul—while he obviously had a lot of zeal and was gifted with words (especially in the written form), he was not exactly the one you would pick out of a catalog. According to Titus, he was "small in size, bald-headed, bow-legged, well built, with eyebrows that met, rather long-nosed, and full of grace."

Many Pauline scholars believe he had a stutter and/or poor eyesight, and the Journal of Neurology postulates that he had epilepsy.

Throughout Scripture we read of unlikely people whom God chooses to use in specific ways: Noah- a drunkard, Abraham- an old man, Moses- a stutterer, Rahab- a prostitute, David- an adulterer and a murderer, Jonah, Mary and Joseph, Matthew... the list goes on and on.

Sometimes God seems to choose the most unlikely of people to serve God's purpose. We never know whom God will choose for what, or when God will call us to something specific. But know this: God calls each and every one of us.

I absolutely love to watch movies. When I am engrossed in a good movie I don't want to give attention to anything else... and please don't talk to me. I enter the story with the characters and I am right there. In a movie where the scenery was quite magnificent, a part-character really stood out to me, or a song stuck in my head, I watch the credits.

Oh my... often the credits seem to be as long as the movie! We are told who did make-up and hair, who drove the stars around, who catered the food, who was the assistant to the assistant to the assistant...

I admit that I find this really irritating. I just want the answers to my questions. But the more I think about it, the list of credits should be lengthy. Each person played an integral part to the success of the whole enterprise. While some may be more noteworthy than others, every individual involved contributed to the whole.

And so it is with the Body of Christ. Some of us will have starring roles and some of us will remain behind the cameras.

But in reality, we all have supporting roles, for we are each but a part of the Body. We are designed by God to be mutually dependent. We are each called to take in and give out the message of God's love by the very way in which we live our lives. To give and receive. To serve, and be served. To love, and be loved.

Often, it is in receiving the gifts of others, that we recognize gifts within ourselves. If we do not leave ourselves open to the fact that each of us is created in God's image, and that each of us has the breath of God within us, we may miss those transforming moments that come our way.

Sometimes we have an earth-shaking experience that is Oscar worthy and points us in a whole new direction.

Sometimes there is the slightest breeze that no one else notices, that just changes our course a little or causes us to see things in a slightly different way.

Sometimes we don't even know what led to a transformation until later in time.

We must allow ourselves to be vulnerable to God and each other if we don't want to miss out on the moments of conversion and transformation that come our way.

And we must remain open, for we never know when, where, or how those moments will come... or who may be a conduit.

Today is Disability Inclusion Sunday in the Presbyterian Church. I lift that up to you as a reminder that each of us is given unique gifts that we are called to share with each other in honor, praise, and service to God.

Each and every one of us is called to a life of faith... being open to God's call... and trusting God enough to follow that call. We may not all be shiny gold vessels, but we are all instruments to the glory of God.

Our stories may not all be Oscar-worthy, but that doesn't matter in the least. For in the end, "the award goes to"... God.