



Calvary Presbyterian Church
Sunday, October 22, 2023

"Christening Calvary: The Making of Sailors"

Rev. Eyde Mabanglo

SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 2:1-10/New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

From Death to Life

²You were dead through the trespasses and sins ²in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. ³All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, doing the will of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else, ⁴but God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ⁵even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—⁹not the result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we may walk in them.

SERMON

A friend of mine is the author of a children's book called "Maddie's Fridge". A few months ago, she invited me to be a writing partner with her. Just two weeks ago, we started meeting for an hour on Zoom. Our time together is a brief catch up

and then we mute our computers and write...for an hour. That's it. I thought I'd share some of my writing from that first night:

Today we start with holding each other accountable. Opening a blank journal and writing for an hour. No other agenda, but to practice a beautiful craft of reflecting and imagining and deconstructing and vision casting and questioning and praising and sorting through life. This one precious life. My life.

I want to write poetry or at least poetically. I want to write about lessons learned in leadership, living and loving. I want to create prose that will bless my neighbor, my siblings, my God. This means that I must ultimately write about love—divine love, abiding love, ancient love, self-love, a steadfast love—forgiving, bidding, encouraging, influential love.

Recently I learned that the original meaning of liturgy...

The word liturgy comes from a Greek term meaning "public work or work done on behalf of the people." Liturgy always referred to an organized community. A work, then, done by an individual or a group was a liturgy on behalf of the larger community.

I guess I wanted my writing to be liturgical in a way to bless the community, those in my realm of influence, the constellation of relationships that make up my world. As a writer (aspiring anyway), I would love to translate how God has blessed me into some kind of composition or resource that might bless others...a collection of axioms, poems, best practices that would help someone on their path of life-long following.

Liturgy is often poetic... in fact, scripture is essentially a collection of poetic passages, wisdom literature, parables, proverbs, and many stories of transformation. **Some say that poetry is the church's native language.** I love that. We need imagery, creative parallels, essential truths shared in metaphor, and sometimes mythological illustrations to better understand the abstract, the unseen, and all things spiritual.

In our worship this morning, we have already experienced so many forms of poetry.

Today's anthem "Holy Spirit Descend on Us" (by Allen Pote) is a prayer for our eyes to be opened to the needs around us as the Holy Spirit descends. This is a reflection on the power of the Spirit to "shape us and change us," to "give us awareness of neighbors in need," and "move us to action from thought into deed."

An excellent piece of art to help us understand what it means to be a sailboat church.

Quote from Sailboat Church, page 48-49:

"We must let Scripture work on us so that we are shaped into the people God means us to be...." [See book by Joan Gray.]

Sounds so much like our anthem today...shape us, change us, move us to action from thought into deed.

Marinating on Scripture as the life of a Christian Sailor (a phrase from Pastor Gray's chapter "The Making of Sailors") made me think of Eugene Peterson's book, called Eat this Book...a reference, no doubt, to Ezekiel 3:1-3:

Ezekiel 3/New Living Translation

3The voice said to me, "Son of man, eat what I am giving you—eat this scroll! Then go and give its message to the people of Israel." 2So I opened my mouth, and he fed me the scroll. 3"Fill your stomach with this," he said. And when I ate it, it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth.

Eugene Peterson writes...*"The task of liturgy is to order the life of the holy community following the text of Holy Scripture. It consists of two movements. First it gets us into the sanctuary, the place of adoration and attention, listening and receiving and believing before God. There is a lot involved, all the parts of our lives ordered to all aspects of the revelation of God in Jesus...Then it gets us out of the sanctuary into the world into places of obeying and loving ordering our lives as living sacrifices in the world to the glory of God. There is a lot involved, all the parts of our lives out on the street participating in the work of salvation."*

—Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading*

In the days that followed my first writing hour with Lois, I started to look more closely at today's passage from Ephesians 2. Interesting enough, it speaks about how we are a work of art, God's craftsmanship, a masterpiece.

It sounds so daunting. Is the church an opus of sacred work prepared in advance for us all to do? Does it help us to see ourselves as God's handiwork?

The passage buoys to the surface for us as we are talking about becoming Christian sailors because it absolutely emphasizes that our being made alive in Christ is not because we rowed our boat harder than anyone else, but because God's powerful Spirit propels us forward.

Ephesians, presumably written by Paul (or a Paul adjacent scribe) was a letter written to be passed around from church to church within the region called Ephesus. Essentially, the passage today is another reminder from our ancient scriptures about the power of the wind in our lives as Christ's church. We must trust the wind, because without it we are left in our brokenness. We must trust in grace. We must boast only in grace. We must move and live and serve and love in grace. The letter demands humility as it also demands lively action.

Especially in the last few verses, we are reminded that we might be tempted to boast that we are a work of art, but that indeed we are not the artist. We might be tempted to boast that we are a masterful composition, a living anthem or novel or portrait revealing the glory of God, but we are not the author. I must admit that when I think of craftsmanship, I always thought of a vessel or a piece of furniture. I thought about my dad's huge tool bench in the garage with the word CRAFTSMAN right on the front! And somehow being called a four-poster bed or a roll-top desk didn't really grab me.

Last week, I looked at several translations and was caught by surprise by the phrasing in the VOICE translation. I had memorized Ephesians 40 years ago and I was very familiar with the verse that says, "for we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus, to do good works which he prepared in advance for us to do." In fact, in many ways, this verse has been a driving verse for my career as a transitional pastor, but in the VOICE translation the word for work of art is actually poetry.

THE VOICE

⁸⁻⁹For it's by God's grace that you have been saved. You receive it through faith. It was not our plan or our effort. It is God's gift, pure and simple. You didn't earn it, not one of us did, so don't go around bragging that you must have done something amazing. ¹⁰For we are the product of His hand, heaven's poetry etched on lives, created in the Anointed, Jesus, to accomplish the good works God arranged long ago.

ONE WEEK LATER... I reflected on this a bit during my writing hour with Lois...

So, I turn now to trying to write poetically about something beautiful, meaningful, true and a sacred blessing. And as I just read Ephesians 2:9-10 in the VOICE translation, I'm wondering instead what God intended when he wrote me.

In other words, how has the poetry of his grace and mercy been writ upon by birth, my life, my story, and my soul? What is his poetry for me? How have I heard it, learned it, lived it, shared it? How is my one, precious life beautiful, meaningful, true, and how has it been a sacred blessing to others as it has been on display for all the world to see? Hear? Know? My redeemed life is God's poetic handiwork etched on my soul. Just knowing this can be life-giving as it also takes my breath away.

In some translations, it says that we are his handiwork, work of art, masterpiece'; the Greek word is POIEMA, meaning poem. We are God's beautiful poem. Something distilled to its essence to reflect beauty and truth. A blessing for generations. A way to connect all of us on earth to all of God eternally. How do we live as the poetry of God in our speaking learning, living, and loving? How do we share this poetry with others?

Mr. Holland's Opus was a film that came out in 1995.

Composer Glenn Holland (played masterfully by Richard Dreyfuss) believes that he'll eventually write a transcendent piece of music, but in the meantime, he's taken a job at an Oregon high school. Though at first the job frustrates him, and his unconventional methods often draw the ire of the strait-laced vice principal, Mr. Holland grows to love his students as the "temporary" position stretches into

a decades-long career -- and in the end, they reveal just how much they love him back.

The story concludes with the retirement of Mr. Holland when many of his former students gather to play together as one ensemble. A former student, addresses the auditorium:

Adult Gertrude Lang (former student and now mayor): Mr. Holland had a profound influence on my life and on a lot of lives I know. But I have a feeling that he considers a great part of his own life misspent. Rumor had it he was always working on this symphony of his. And this was going to make him famous, rich, probably both. But Mr. Holland isn't rich, and he isn't famous, at least not outside of our little town. So, it might be easy for him to think of himself as a failure. But he would be wrong, because I think that he's achieved success far beyond riches and fame. Look around you. There is not a life in this room that you have not touched, and each of us is a better person because of you. We are your symphony Mr. Holland. We are the melodies and the notes of your opus. We are the music of your life.

Calvary, look around you. There is not a life in this room that God's Holy Wind has not touched, and each of us is a better person because of The Spirit. We are God's poem. We are the melodies, the liturgy, the lyrics, and the notes of the opus of Christ. We are the poem of God.

And what if we heard from Enumclaw and our neighbors from the plateau that there is not a life in this community that Calvary's witness has not touched, and each of us is better for it. We are part of God's poem now. We are also the melodies, the liturgy, the lyrics, and the notes of this eternal opus. We are all now the poem of Christ.

Our God is holy wind...

As Christian Sailors, let us trust the power and the wisdom to move us forward.

Our God is our brilliant poet...

As Christ's handiwork, let us live as the living, liturgical poetry of God.

Now and forever.

May it be so,

