

GBC Sermon, June 2, 2019 - Allan Smith
"Call On Me"
Luke 24:44-53

It seems fitting that on this Graduate Sunday we would begin with that ever-so popular question. What do you want to do when you grow up? And yes, that is a question for all of you because it is a question you should consider whether you are a child, a graduate, or even retired. What do you want to do when you grow up?

Sure, answers may vary. I am sure, especially if you ask younger children you will hear about some great ambitions. Astronaut, award-winning scientist, even President may be popular answers from elementary aged students. I admit I was no different - I remember having to craft an essay about my own future for a school assignment and writing about my career as a two-sport star where I played in both the NFL and the NBA.

What do you want to do when you grow up? This was a topic of youth group discussions on Sunday nights this past fall, where many in our congregation came and shared with the students about their careers. This is my plug to encourage you all to ask the students about their future plans, at least as of now. Many aspire to be work in education, medicine, or law.

But that question sticks with us - What do you want to do when you grow up? And it seems to be connected to the question of what are you going to do for money? What kind of job will you have? How do you plan to support yourself?

And, of course, it seems the most ambitious students are the ones whose answers could lead to earning the most money.

I have heard from multiple people about the article in the Raleigh News & Observer this week about the toxic environment for students in local high schools where the social and academic pressure is significant. It named social pressures associated with other students receiving new cars and exotic vacations. I am sure many of you came across the article as well. In fact, a youth minister at a local church is the person raising awareness about this issue!

For me, though, the most alarming truth of the article is the connection that seems to be present between happiness and money. Imagine going to the students feeling the social pressures named in that article and asking them that common question - What do you want to do when you grow up? My guess is many students are prepared with answers that, they think, would allow them to provide new cars and exotic vacations to their own children.

Now, let me make myself very clear that well-paying jobs, successful careers, and providing for your family are not bad things by any stretch of the imagination. That being said, we can consider the question of what do you want to do when you grow up with a greater sense of imagination.

Even I grew out of those early ambitions of being a two-sport professional athlete. (It doesn't take sitting on the bench for that many games at the YMCA to realize you may need a new career path.) And what could be more opposite than being a minister!

No, for me it wasn't that simple either. Sure, I became very involved with my church and my youth group, particularly during high school. I was there whenever the doors were opened. I often was giving rides to friends so that more could participate. I was speaking up, taking every opportunity that I could to share God's love with others, regardless of how "accurate" my perspective actually was.

And, yes, I remember times, particularly during experiences on mission trips and at Unidiversity Youth Camp during the summers, where I thought I might be one who is called to be a minister. I mean why not? All you did was go skiing, whitewater rafting, and work Sundays and Wednesdays, right?

But that idea of call was intimidating to me. How did I know that I was really *called* to ministry? Did I really want to commit to that for all of my working days? Because for me, saying yes to ministry was an answer for the next 50 years.

These were questions I continued to ask as a young adult. I had been out of college for a few years and working a business job in Richmond while volunteering with the youth program (and a few other ministry programs) at a church there. I was engaging with several conversation partners about this question of if I should explore seminary. One of those conversation partners was the pastor at the time of the church in South Carolina where I had participated in youth group. During one of our conversations, he said to me, "Allan, God might call you away from your job and to seminary. And after seminary, God might call you to serve in a church ministry position. And after that, God might call you away from that church position and back to a business job. And that's okay."

What a relief I felt. Those words gave me the freedom to begin seminary, without the fear that I might have misunderstood a specific call in my own life. For even if I attended seminary only to become a really good Sunday School teacher, that was okay!

We continue this week with the Language of Faith series. Fittingly, on this Graduate Sunday we are reflecting on the word "Calling". And if I could channel the spirit of the words that pastor shared with me several years ago it would be that calling is much broader than what you do for a job. Let me say that again - calling is much broader than what you do for a job.

The text for this morning comes from those final moments that Jesus spent with the disciples, those moments following the resurrection right before his ascension. Jesus reminds his closest friends that everything written about him had been fulfilled, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations. And that the disciples had been witnesses to these things.

Imagine if Jesus asked the disciples that common question at that moment - what do you want to do when you grow up? "Go back to fishing!" they might say. Which many of them did. The truth of the story, though, is that regardless of what each of them did for a living, each also remained a witness to the life and ministry of Jesus, and each was called to share what they had witnessed with the rest of the world.

Last year I attended a conference for CBF youth ministers. At one point, everyone stood up and was asked to remain standing as ministers were recognized based on years of service in ministry. I don't remember why I did this, maybe my own stubbornness, but I found myself remaining standing as they called out years - 1, 3, 5, 10 and on they went. I even had friends extending funny looks in my direction, wondering why I continued to stand.

Well, regardless of having been a seminary graduate for a mere 5 years, you cannot tell me that the years I spent teaching high school and college Sunday School classes, leading youth groups on Wednesday nights and Sunday nights, and even meeting high schoolers for breakfast before school for a morning Bible study did not count as ministry.

So, what do you want to do when you grow up? Except, when you consider that question, think about what it is that God is calling you to do. What is it that fills your soul with energy and life? It is not a question of how many new cars you have or exotic vacations you take.

Regardless of where you are in life, listen to the voice of God. A wonderful resource on calling is *Let Your Life Speak* by Parker Palmer, from which comes our reflection for this morning. Palmer suggests that paying attention to your own experiences and interests and simply learning more about who you are and what you love to do is the best way to discover what you could do with your life.

In fact, Palmer also reminds his readers of the statement by theologian Frederick Buechner that calling is where "your deep gladness meets the world's deep need."

Where your deep gladness meets the world's deep need. What words to guide our lives. So what do you want to do when you grow up? I hope you are willing to listen to God, and to say "Call on me. Help me to see where my deep gladness might meet the world's deep need."

That's my prayer for each of you, particularly for you graduates. That you would find connections between your deep gladness and the world's deep need. That you would find happiness, not in the amount of 0s on your paycheck, but in the way that you respond to God's call in your life.

Calling is a lot broader than what you do for a living. It is about how you follow God to the places where you find yourself fulfilled. For me, I found just as much calling in the relationships formed with students who would come to my house to watch football and eat pizza, all of which I could

afford because of my business job, as I do sitting in the office down the hall. In both cases, I was able to say to God, "Call on Me".

So what do you want to do when you grow up?