

After a couple weeks of Social Justice emphasis, the readings lead us to consider the idea of personal calling. The prophet Isaiah talks about his personal calling: The Lord called me before I was born; called my name while I was in my mother's womb. (Isaiah 49:1-2). The prophet Jeremiah also heard a voice from his Lord: "Before you were born, I consecrated you." We recall that Martin Luther King Jr. began to preach alongside his father at age 19. While I'm not a big fan of predestination in the sense of being locked in to a "plan for our lives," it does seem to make sense that each of us has a certain predisposition, character or giftedness that makes itself known at a very young age! It holds true when we look at siblings or even twins; Each of us is unique, with unique potential or "calling. Today I'm thinking of Drake Maye, Patriots QB, and how people are interviewing the football coaches of his youth, making note that they all saw the beginnings of future greatness.

As we go through life, we get opportunities to live into our calling, to become our true and authentic selves. We often wonder, especially as we get older, have I fulfilled my "purpose" in this life? We may have several callings, at different stages of life. When physical and intellectual abilities decline, we may have to limit our goals. Most of you know "Jean K," who got public recognition for being one of the best and beloved teachers in Newburyport. She asks the same questions as many elderly: Why am I still here? What is my purpose now? Well, wouldn't you know(!)...at the retirement home, the staff asks her to take her kind *friendly self* over to chat with certain residents that are depressed or upset. At any age, we can always hear a universal calling, to share compassionate love with a neighbor.

Remember the cute little child actress, Drew Barrymore, who at 3-4 years old had a touching friendship with E.T.? ("E.T. phone home!") Well, she has a new calling, a TV talk show, that emphasizes love, especially self-love, accepting ourselves and being free to be our true

selves. Like many child actors, she developed a real problem with self-esteem and self-image. She showed a photo of herself at 10 years old, a bit chubby, looking rather blankly into the camera. Drew remembered tearfully: “I had no idea who I was, or who I was *supposed to be*... People said I was not blond enough, not thin enough, not what they wanted me to be.” How devastating when we accept the judgment of others, who try to tell us what we should be. Congratulations to Drew, and her side-kick “Ross”(!) for having a show based on loving oneself and loving others, accepting oneself and others for who we really are!

So let me share a few words about my own calling; people do often ask me, How or when did you feel called to be a minister? It is really too long to relate in a brief sermon, but I’ll share a few key moments. I think back to my teenage lawn mowing days. I had about ten house lawns to mow every week, about two a day, morning and afternoon. At one house, the retired couple would often invite me to have some lemonade with them afterwards; we’d sit in their patio and I’d ask them about their world travels, and they’d ask me what I liked most about school and any plans or goals I might have. The money was good, but the conversations were even better!

When I was in college I spent a summer as an orderly in a nursing home (now I think we say “personal care worker”), which of course was to improve my resume’ so I could more easily get into medical school. Suffice it to say that learning about diseases and medications was interesting, but for me, learning about people’s lives and feelings was far more interesting! I was being called to be my true self: social, with caring ministry, learning about the joys and sufferings in all human beings.

I need to say a word about Grace, as in the opening words of Paul to the Corinthians. Paul often gives testimony to the Grace of God that saved him and propelled him onward. (He was so imperfect... a persecutor of Christians, then saved by the grace of Christ himself.) He

is clear that Grace means: so much of who we are is a gift. We could say that the beginning of our lives, experiencing love and feeding, is all a gift. Infants cannot “earn” the steadfast love and attention that they need. If there are friends, teachers, mentors who show us love and care later in life, praise God for them!

I need to go back to my father to talk about Grace. He was adopted by parents who cared greatly about education. His adoptive mother was a teacher and his adoptive father was a superintendent of schools. He enlisted in the military in WWII, was stateside, and upon completion of service, he received money from the G.I. bill to continue his education, even to a masters degree. His parents and the G.I. bill give him the gift of education, which allowed him to rise and progress to being a school principal.

In my life, all four of us children received the gift of piano lessons; they cost plenty! Attending college was an economic grace... I still recall that Williams College, in western MA was about 6,000 dollars a year, and I recall that about 1500 was a gift from my parents, about 1500 came from grant or gift from the college, about 1500 was a loan (a form of gift) and about 1500 was from my summer and on-campus work... most of it, you can see, was gift, or Grace (or we could say “Privilege”).

The degree from Williams then opened doors... another example of Grace... I left the Pre-med route (not my true self) and decided I'd really like to teach Spanish, and guess what? At a nearby prep school for boys (Eaglebrook), the headmaster happened to be a graduate of Williams, and asked me more about my time at college than about my proficiency in Spanish!

When I was teaching Spanish later in Maryland, I was attending a large Presbyterian Church, singing in a large choir of some 50 people... and guess what? I was the one in the choir *taking notes* during the sermon time! I loved trying to figure out what the preacher might say on

a given topic or Bible verse. I found myself thinking, I like what I see and hear, and I can see myself doing that one day!

I'm going to close with a little song I wrote about 30 years ago. Our calling or calling(s) in life can have many ups and downs, stops and starts, readjusting as life goes along. As actress Drew Barrymore learned, Grace is also accepting that we all have limits and failings, that there is no perfect ideal (Even coach Mike Vrabel says today his Patriots football team strives for Precision, not Perfection!) I wrote this song after a divorce, while feeling pretty badly about myself... (how can love fail, and is new life really possible?) I needed to accept myself for giving it my best. I needed to believe that there can be new hope, new love and new callings all the days of our lives, as we keep growing into our true and best selves.

Song: SPIRIT BLOOMING

Sown in the dark fertile soil of the womb. Sprouting, growing, not yet in bloom. Falling, rising, finding our way. Risking, learning, living each day. Hearing your voice that says "I am the way". Send your light, Lord, send your light upon our path and we will follow, faithfully.

So many dangers and trials we have known. Some of our making, some not our own. We are your children, beloved and dear. You know our hearts, and you share our tears. And always with grace, you say "Loved ones, drawn near." Set us free, Lord, set us free to be the ones that you imagined, eternally.

So, with each step we draw closer to you. Loving, serving, all is made new! We are the miracle seed that has grown. Learning to love and to know as we're known. Finding your love and your joy now our own. We are free, Lord, we are free to be the ones that you created, beautifully.