

Brenda Seat: Call as Being and Doing

Seekers Church

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Call as Being and Doing or Sometimes a Burp Can be Call

Over the last six months or so I've been thinking a lot about "call"... as I think all of us have. My mission group has read and discussed Marjory's book on call. I have been a part of many discussions in the School of Christian Living, in Stewards and in many other places about call. Just like many of you have too. The topic of call seems to be permeating our lives.

As part of the Outreach Ministries Team I have been thinking about our call to Takoma, how we can become aware of the calls among us, how to see the connections between our calls and the needs of that community. Nevertheless, although our group has taken on the task of listening for call, and being aware of the needs that we see, we realized that the whole community needed to be a part of the conversation about our call to Takoma.

To help us begin that conversation, Outreach Ministries asked Celebration Circle if we could ask several people from both inside and outside our community to preach about call...the process of call and how it is sustained over the long haul. They agreed and [Marjory's sermon last week](#), about Sonya's

call, began this series. My sermon today is the second one. In addition, later on during this season of Pentecost we will be hearing from people outside our community and how they have sustained or been sustained in their call.

Like many missionary kids, the concept of call was something I learned very early. My parents talked about call as something that gave them purpose, and they were filled with an enormous love for those they served. Although my parents never talked about their call as being sacrificial, every time we came back to the States, we were treated as if we were something strange, awesome and unique. People that we met at various churches often talked about our "sacrifice" in hushed, and awed tones. Call for these people was something that happened only to a chosen few – after all, God talked directly to those who were called – and many of these people spent a lot of time hoping that they wouldn't be called, would not hear God's voice and would not have to make that sacrifice.

As I grew up and got married, went to Law School, and became a mother, there were times when I was thankful that God had not called me. ... and then I came to Seekers...

Call is central to our community life and to our inward journey with God. In the "[Guide to Seekers](#)" we talk about this centrality...Listen: "

...[T]he life of Seekers is based on an amazing belief: Each one of us is called by God to a particular area of service. Young or old; regardless of experience, skills or education; despite our past successes or failures—God issues each of us an individual call. It is a desire placed by God in the heart of each person. The spiritual journey in Seekers Church grows out of a commitment to answer "Yes" to this call from God... It is in following our call that we experience the mystery of God's presence in our community and an ever deepening friendship with God in our inner lives."

Since coming to Seekers, I have spent a lot of time thinking, talking and living call. However, sometimes call is hard to put your finger on... Right at the moment that you think you have it figured out it slips away. Moreover, as Marjory has pointed out in her book, there are cycles to call and what was once call early in life may not be your call later in life. Call is not something that you figure out once, it is something that you constantly revisit and with which you consistently wrestle. Call is nebulous, easily mistaken for something else, and sometimes we are caught up in thinking call is about doing, and we forget that call is also about being.

Early in my life (when I was six or seven), I began reading books by a great theologian...Dr. Seuss. I would like to share with you some of his insights into call.

Yertle the Turtle, by Dr. Seuss.

Our story begins with Yertle the Turtle who becomes very power hungry...

He decides that the pond that he is king over is not big enough for such a marvelous turtle like he! So he begins to stack turtles, so he can sit higher and be King over more, and the higher he stacks and the more he sees, the more power hungry he becomes and the higher he wants to go.

In the meantime, there is a lowly turtle named Mack, who is at the bottom of the stack. Mack does not like being used in this way ... and, being the justice loving, egalitarian turtle that he is, he raises some of his concerns with Yertle.

... At the bottom [of the stack] was a turtle named Mack. ...And this plain little turtle, looked up and he said, "Beg you pardon, King Yertle. I have pains in my back and my shoulders and knees. How long must we stand here, Your Majesty, please?"

"Silence"... barks Yertle...

Moreover, he begins to call more turtles to make his throne even higher. The turtles come and they come and each turtle steps on poor Mack's head as they climb up the stack! Yertle, of course loves his new view....

*[But] then again from the below, in that great heavy stack,
Came a groan from that plain little turtle named Mack.
"Your Majesty, please... I do not like to complain,
But down here below, we are feeling great pain.
I know, up on top, you are seeing great sights,
But down at the bottom, we too should have rights.
We turtles can't stand it. Our shells will all crack!
Besides, we need food. We are starving!" groaned Mack.*

"...Hush up..." says Yertle.

And then Yertle notices the moon which has just come out, and he decides that he must be even higher, but just as he is about to issue a new demand for more turtles...

*That plain little turtle below in the stack,
That plain little turtle whose name was just Mack,
Decided he'd taken enough. And he had.
And that plain little Mack did a plain little thing.
He burped!
And his burp shook the throne of the king!*

And ...Well, that was the end of the Turtle King's rule!

And Yertle... is King of the Mud... and all the turtles are free!

What is it that makes Mack do this? Whenever I read this story, I was always cheering for Mack, but I wondered deep inside, could I do that?

One of the stories in our Gospel lesson began to shed some

light. Jairus's daughter is sick, and Jairus finds Jesus and asks him to come and heal her. Jesus is on his way, but a messenger meets them and tells them she is already dead. Nevertheless, Jesus says, "No she is just sleeping." He goes to the house, stands by her bed and calls to her, "Little girl, get up!" and she does.

Ten years or so ago we bought two wisteria vines and planted them so that they would climb around the posts supporting the second story of our deck. Each year we have hoped that we would have blooming wisteria, and each year the plants have failed to bloom. They are very much alive. Very much growing and living and taking over increasingly more space on the deck...but neither vine has ever bloomed. They have not yet truly become what they are intended...they have not yet bloomed and become all they can be.

Sometimes we too seem asleep. We are alive and working and doing, functioning, but we are asleep, unaware of God's call in our lives, unaware of what we are to be about. Like Jairus' daughter, we need to be awakened, to hear the call, to become alive to what we are intended for, what God has called us to be.

Being aware...knowing who we are... beginning to feel that deep desire that God has placed in each one of us. These seem to be important parts of not only understanding call, but also being able to continue to do what we need to do to further that call. Moreover, maybe it is that deep sense of knowing, being aware, that makes it possible for Mack to do what he does!

As many of you know I have struggled with my place here. I have struggled with my sense of call and what that meant, struggled with whether this was really the right place for me, and our family. For quite a while, I felt "call-less" in this community where call is so central. I flailed, struggled and floundered around. Meanwhile, you were patient! However, since [I preached about my struggles](#), last October, I have come to a

very different place. Just the fact that I stood up here and said, "Ok, Ok, I give up! I will commit to this church and to this community," seemed to awaken something in me, released something that had been holding me back from finding a new call here. I have felt that awakening. I have begun to feel that awareness in myself. As a result, I have felt called to be come more involved and to find new ways of being with this community.

The other story in the gospel lesson for this morning is about the woman who touched the hem of Jesus' robe and was healed. I have a real appreciation for her! We know very little about her, she has no name, we know nothing of her family, whether she was old or young at the time of the story, or what happened to her after this incident.

Scripture only tells us that she is a sick woman, with a long history of sickness, of going to many doctors and exhausting her financial resources in order to become well. It also tells us that her sickness was being subject to bleeding. We are told this because the early readers of the Gospels were people who were familiar with the Jewish laws of ritual uncleanness, and for them this had special significance. This woman, during the 12 years that she had been sick, had been subject to very strict rules restricting her daily life, her ability to interact with people and her ability to worship God. Her sickness set her apart – it was a vivid reminder to the people of her time of how sin separates us from God.

However, this woman refused to give in to her sickness. She refused to let her sickness define her. Mark tells us that she had suffered a great deal under the care of various doctors and had spent all she had in order to get better. I find this remarkable, especially since this was during a time period when people usually felt that whatever came their way was the judgment of God, and that trying to change what God had ordained was wrong.

However, this woman sees things differently. She believes that she is more than her sickness. She wants to be healed and is willing to do everything she can to make that happen. She must have believed that God wanted her to be more than what her sickness allowed her to be, and it was this belief, this awareness, that caused her to eventually seek out Jesus.

Her encounter with Jesus is brief. A simple touch of his robe as he passed through the crowd on his way to heal someone else. He stops, and when she explains what she did and why, and Jesus responds, "Daughter, your faith has healed you, go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

In all the other times I read this story, I thought the faith that Jesus was referring to was her belief that all she needed to do was touch Jesus' robe in order to be healed. However, as I worked with this story, that seemed too simplistic an answer, too one-dimensional. Jesus must have seen more than that. Jesus must have also seen in her, this persistent belief that there was more to her life than her sickness. Her belief that God must have more for her than this limited life, defined by these rules. He saw her refusal to be held back, to be willing to become a pauper in order to be healed—in order to become fully what God intended her to be. Moreover, he knew that was what made her whole – her faith that God had called her to be more than what her sickness allowed her to be. In addition, it was that faith that made her whole.

Call ... What God called her to be...

Call is about doing. But what I have learned from Dr. Seuss and Mack the turtle, from Jairus' daughter and from this woman who touched Jesus' robe, is that we need to awake and aware of God's call to be all we were intended to be, and then the doing is joyful, rich and fulfilling, not sacrificial. In addition, this sustains us and keeps us going, giving us energy to do more.

Our theme for Pentecost is "There is no one but us," but if we are all that God intended us to be, then that is enough!

Amen!