

# Called to a Task

## *Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time*

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Then Jesus told his disciples, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow me. Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. What will profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?”

I remember a sermon from years ago when the preacher spoke of the worldview of one taking up his cross. I tried to remember the complete text, but the thrust impressed me. We were asked to imagine the place of the man with the cross. He was on a one-way journey with a specific destination. Life had no more distractions, only a singular focus. Life was also out of the control of the person. Others now determined where he would go, what he would do, and how long. Indeed, the participant now lived out the life of another’s will.

Perhaps this does not sound very attractive at all.

But Jesus did not promise it would be easy or easy to take.

We have a language that describes this. We refer to this as a calling or a vocation. We take this as being distinctive of a certain number of people. It is seen as the province of clergy and the religious and as the moving into a life that involves sacrifice and hardship. Indeed, it is not a great career move, but it comes in response to an innate sense of calling to a task.

Our first reading is an exciting insight. So, when we slow down long enough to read this story carefully, we see it begins with God. He starts the process by getting Moses to listen. I wonder, “How would God try to get my attention?” What if God has presented me with burning bushes, and I’ve never turned aside? And then I wonder, “What might God be calling me to do that I’m not hearing?”

In a beautiful book called *Let Your Life Speak*, The author, Parker Palmer, is a Christian teacher and writer. He writes, “I first learned about vocation growing up in the church. I value much about the religious tradition in which I was raised. . . . But the idea of ‘vocation’ I picked up in those circles distorted until I grew strong enough to discard it. I mean the idea that vocation, or calling, comes from a voice external to ourselves, a voice of moral demand that asks us to become someone we are not yet – someone different, someone better, someone just beyond our reach.”

“Today, I understand vocation quite differently – not as a goal to be achieved, but as a gift to be received. Discovering my vocation does not mean scrambling toward some prize just beyond my reach but accepting the treasure of the true self I already possess.

Vocation does not come from a voice ‘out there’ calling me to become something I am not. It comes from a voice ‘in here’ calling me to be the person I was born to be, to fulfil the original selfhood given me at birth by God.” (p. 10)

What God might be calling me to, that I’m not hearing, Parker Palmer implies that listening to God means slowing down to listen for an internal voice and paying attention to what is right in front of me.

On his way to work, Moses noticed a bush. What do you see on your way to work? God can use many things as an occasion to speak – a crisis or illness, a celebration, some chance remarks from a friend, or even just something or someone that we happen to notice on our way to work. What catches your attention on your way to work? And what are you failing to see?

And what we speak of as individuals, we can also speak of as a church. We trap ourselves in busyness rather than hearing God or listening to God. But as much as we try to ignore it, God will find a way to get through. But we are better to learn to listen rather than force him to grab our attention.

And we must not assume that he speaks once and does not call again. I have a calling as a priest, and I sincerely believe I am here to do God’s work. There is a divine mandate, but does it go on forever? I am now in the throws of moving towards retirement, although it is still a way off. What is it that God wants me to do next?

I will never know if I am not prepared to listen.

This is not just a personal thing but the way we journey as God’s people. As we take up our Cross, we are under instruction; we also need to listen to those instructions and especially do it.

**AMEN**