

“A Cobbler Who Is a Poet”

Exodus 3:1-5 (Moses is bowled over with his call by God—and takes off his shoes.)
Mark 6:1-6 (The people do not expect Jesus, the carpenter, to be a teacher and a healer!)

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Redlands First United Methodist Church

When the United Methodist Women were planning their tea that was at our home, last spring, I was told that Susan Kean would be bringing the flowers. I thought to myself, they must mean Kathy Tully. Kathy brings flowers. Susan leads meetings and speaks in front of people. Indeed, Susan brought the flowers.

When a church member came by the church early one morning with a desire to pray, before we pastors had arrived, but not before John Baker, our custodian, was here, John opened the doors to the sanctuary, prayed and talked with the church member. John the custodian provided compassionate pastoral care.

Sarah Overton, one of our church members who is an attorney, is one of the dedicated volunteers for our SHARE ministry, feeding the hungry at Jenny Davis Park on Saturdays.

Carl Jung, a profound and famous psychologist of the last century, wrote that “society demands a kind of surety: each must stand at his (or her) post, here a cobbler, there a poet. . . society is persuaded that only a cobbler who is *not* a poet can supply workmanlike shoes.” Carl Jung obviously wrote that as an observation about humanity, not as how it should be. What do you think?

If you were to go to a fence-building company to inquire about their building a brick fence in your back yard, and you noticed that there was poetry all over the place—books of poetry on book shelves, some poems under glass on the counter—would you trust that this brick layer was serious about fences?

In fact, most poets, writers, and musicians often *have to* make a living doing something else! T. S. Eliot worked in a bank. Our own poet Christine Smith is a mental health counselor.

When I went to my doctor in Dayton, Ohio, the last time, before I moved back to California, she did a curious thing. She gave me a present, a bracelet that she had made. I had been her patient for 17 years. Then, as I tearfully left her office, saying goodbye, she gave me a bracelet. My doctor was also a jeweler. She had gotten religion, as part of her healing from some of her own problems, and the different gems in her jewelry represented various disciples, she said. It was an odd moment for me. She was my doctor. All of a sudden she was an artist, a jeweler, and she was speaking of faith to me.

Moses had just made a new life for himself as a shepherd, serving his father-in-law, Jethro. He herded his sheep toward new grazing land, on the mountain called Horeb, or Sinai. When we encounter Moses, in this passage, this shepherd is undergoing a mystical experience. We know it is out-of-the-ordinary, for unusual events occur--an angel, to start with, appears. Moses is not so intent upon his work that he misses God's guidance. When he senses something nudging him, he says, “Here I am,” surely with no idea *what he was just about to be volunteered by God to do*. Moses was especially aware

that he was in the presence of the Holy. So Holy, Moses quickly took off his shoes. In this transforming moment, Moses became not only a shepherd, but **also** a political and religious leader. He took on this new vocation--or avocation—only after some intense dialogue with God, who is presented here as quite loquacious—God doesn't stop talking. When Moses discerns that God wants him to lead the people out of suffering to freedom, Moses himself voices serious doubts, “Who am I that I should ...” Moses experiences God as saying, “I will be with you.” There are various strands of theology in the Hebrew Bible; the theology of this part of the Hebrew Bible is one that talks of God as walking around on earth. So, in this passage, God says God has **seen, known, and heard** afflictions of people—Moses must act. So, he does. There is danger involved in Moses' task... yet he is persuaded that the very power for life, I AMNESS, is with him as he goes to serve the people.

Jesus was a carpenter, the son of a carpenter. The people who knew him in Galilee knew he was a carpenter, the son of a carpenter. Yet as we see him, Jesus is returning from travel and is teaching and healing. How can this be? We usually think of this passage (“a prophet is not without honor except in his own country”) as naming the tendency for us not to value persons in our own *location*; if you were born in Redlands and became a musician, you may be appreciated everywhere—except Redlands. However, this passage really speaks more about *vocation*. Jesus was a carpenter, so his people had difficulty seeing him as a healer. Galilee was a prosperous place during this period of history.ⁱ It is unlikely that Jesus and his family were poor or day laborers, but as local craftsmen they would likely have been considered “lower” in status than those of the educated class. Often villagers would resent those who attempted to elevate themselves to a position that was higher than given to them by birth.

When Moses was enlisted into novel behavior by God, it was Moses himself who doubted that he, a shepherd, should or could be a prophet, a justice-maker. In contrast, as Jesus was enlisted into novel behavior by God, Jesus seemed at peace with his calling; however, those around him were befuddled, wary.

How do you and I find our vocations or avocations? How are these revealed to us? How limited are we by our initial birth families and home town sentiments? How do we—can we—do what God might have us do for the world through our work, avocations, service, and even “hobbies”?

Carl Jung, the psychologist, teased us humans with his skeptical observation, saying that we categorize people, that we box each other in, that we'd not trust a cobbler who is a poet. However, that choice of Carl Jung, to name a cobbler who is a poet, is a peculiar example, precisely because history includes at least two magnificent cobblers who *were poets!*

Hans Sachs was a German poet who was the most famous of the 16th century Meistersingers. Meistersingers were artisans who wrote poems and songs as an avocation. Hans became a master shoemaker, working all his life as a cobbler in Nuremberg. Yet, in his free time, he composed hundreds of narrative poems, master songs, and dramas. Martin Luther, the founder of the Lutheran Church, praised Hans Sachs for his poetic gifts.

Paul Tillich and other 20th century theologians were influenced by the ideas of Jacob Boehm, who was a German mystic and philosopher, yet he, too, was a shoemaker, a traveling cobbler.ⁱⁱ

Moses' call to save his people **was** out-of-the-ordinary. Jesus, the carpenter, called to heal and teach, **was** out-of-the-ordinary. Cobbler poets who influence theologians **are** out-of-the-ordinary.

Most of us are not called to be Moses or Jesuses. Yet, God calls us to vocations and sometimes we—or our families—are perplexed by those calls. I confess I'm perplexed by an event that occurred this week. A family arrived at this church a couple days ago looking for “the hip-hop dancing class.” We offer many events at First Church, but I was not aware of that class. We finally realized the dance class was part of the art program that meets here on Saturdays. Meanwhile, the mother of the family asked if we offered tutoring. I asked, “What subject?” She pointed to her young son and said, “Math.” Knowing it was absurd, time wise; I heard myself saying to her, “If you don't find the tutoring, come back. I might be able to help.” I confess I'd love to volunteer to tutor basic math. Actually, I feel “called” to do so. Yet, I think I need to be patient. It's probably a “retirement” calling. As so many of you retired persons exemplify, you become open and excited about brand new forms of volunteer service.

I believe that God is constantly seeking to get our attention. What is required of us is a willingness to see. However, in order to be able to see, we need to have **huge expectations** for what can be—especially through ourselves.

God's own self-revealing is quite complex. If I expect that I will only know God through reading the Bible, or listening to a sermon, or going to Sunday School, even if it's called Sunday Cool, then I'll likely miss out on seeing God in the very people and places that I find in my pathway. My Islamic dentist, in fact, shares some thought-provoking insights. Perhaps the librarian could fix the church van!

Expanding our notion of how God can reveal God's self, of how we can experience the holy, can be disorienting. When that happens, *the whole world may become ripe to be transformed or to transform us.*

This Sunday, as some of us are wearing “work” clothes, we are actually being called to “think outside our work clothes.” We are challenging ourselves to sign up to “be of service” for some time this week to help some people in our very community. We do this fully aware that many of us *already help others in the community*—either through programs our church already has—or through programs offered by Scouting, AAUW, Kiwanis, The purpose of this week of service is to get *some* of us *started* to serve while empowering others of us to find novel niches, places we haven't tried yet, but might discover is a good fit.

I believe God calls carpenters, shepherds, math teachers, chemists and bus drivers. . . We need devoted people in all those areas. God also calls people—perhaps the very same people who are chemists and bus drivers—to pack food for the Helping Hands Pantry, to sort donations for the Blessing center, and to assemble hygiene kits and food bags that we hand out here—or to pray.

We're usually paid for our vocation; whereas we do service for free. Wait a minute; that conclusion only focuses upon money. We *are* paid for service with *joy* that we are genuinely helping others, *appreciation* given by those we do help, and a *sense of fulfillment* to our “divine call,” no matter how out-of-the-ordinary that call may seem.

As Moses and the people of Galilee would testify, God is one persistent God—when God sets about recruiting us to do something.

Now, if someone asks you the gist of the sermon today, I don't want you to think it is *only* "Sign up to serve, this week." I want somehow to convey the importance of these two passages about Moses' shocking new task and Jesus' vocation that surprises his neighbors—precisely because *not just this week, but any time at all* God might surprise **you** with a **sense of call to rise to some occasion; if so, for sure God will be with you.**

ⁱ a village of 1600 to 2000 people

ⁱⁱ before he established a "bench" of his own