

Sermon for Sunday, September 12, 2021 - "It's Not About You"

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

It's not about you.

There are some big topics covered in our readings this week. The takeaway I have from it all is the simple phrase - it's not about you. And that's good news for each of us.

There's so much emphasis on the self in our culture: self-improvement, self-expression, self-care, self-esteem, selfies. All of these can be good things, but they can also become exhausting. How *do* you look in that selfie? Are you doing enough to care for yourself? You *could* try this diet, this lifestyle change, these ten simple steps. Are you living well and making a difference? Maybe, but when you look at your social media feed, maybe not. Does your life have meaning and purpose? Will your obituary show that you've lived a full life? All the focus on self can make us anxious, competitive, unsatisfied, prone to judging and gossiping about others.

In an opinion piece entitled "It's Not About You", columnist David Brooks discusses these problems and says our culture needs to give better advice to young adults.¹ He notes that when you listen to graduation speeches, you hear a familiar refrain: "Follow *your* passion, chart *your* own course, march to the beat of *your* own drummer, follow *your* dreams, find *yourself*." This is all a lot of pressure. And, he argues, "most successful ... people don't look inside and then plan a life. They look outside and find a problem, which summons their life. A relative suffers from Alzheimer's and [a loved one] feels called to help cure that disease. A ... person works under a miserable boss and must develop management skills so the department can function." Brooks writes, "most people don't form a self and then lead a life. They are called by a problem, and the self is constructed gradually by their calling."

As Christians we are called by a problem - this world is not what God intends. God's dream is shalom, the peace and wellbeing of all creation. God's dream is that we live in harmony with God, one another, and all that God has made. We are clearly quite far from this dream. So, God calls us to face this problem within ourselves and in the larger world. God calls us to die to our sinful, self-centered way of being. And God calls us into the work of healing and redeeming this world.

That can sound intense and demanding. Yet it is also very liberating. It isn't up to us to make something of ourselves, construct our own lives, secure our futures, or leave a legacy. God's call is what gives our lives meaning, purpose and significance each day.

¹ [It's Not About You By David Brooks, New York Times, May 30, 2011](#). All quotes from this opinion piece.

We all are called to different roles and various tasks. This past year, the members of our Anti-racism Task Force have been summoned by the pain of racism in our culture. Others were summoned by the work of making masks, serving as shepherds for flocks of Good Shepherd members. or to deepen prayer for the sake of the world. As we begin the Sunday School year, many are being summoned to work with our children and youth.

Yet God's overall call for each of us is to be part of God's work of shalom. As we respond to this call, our lives are constructed by God's love, justice, and mercy. It's not all about us. We are summoned by a problem beyond us. Yet as Christians, we aren't just summoned by what is wrong. We are also summoned by our loving God who created us, who delights in us, who gives us life each new day.

When Jesus calls us to follow and give up our small, self-focused lives, this is good news. Jesus is saying to us: Your life is not about you, it is a gift from God. God is holding you and your life. You can surrender to God and experience God's abundant life for you. You can surrender to God and discover what God will do through you.

It's not about us - thank God! We can let go of the anxiety and exhaustion and judgement that come with a self-focused life. We can trust our lives to God. This does not mean that our lives will be easy. Our scripture passages today are clear that all of us will face suffering, especially when we follow in the way of Jesus seeking God's shalom.

When suffering comes, it is again good news to hear the message - it's not about you. Often when we suffer, we turn inward. We question what we've done to deserve this, why this has happened to us. We feel isolated from others whose lives seem so much easier. We think there's something wrong with us. Our scriptures today reveal that suffering isn't a sign that you've done something wrong or that God has abandoned you. It's not about you.

Even the Messiah, God's anointed servant, was not able to avoid suffering in this broken world. Instead, he entered the pain of the world showing that there is nowhere God won't go to heal and redeem creation. Faithfulness to God does not mean a get out of suffering free pass. It means following Jesus, the one who entered even death to bring new life for us all. As we follow, we will face suffering and struggle. Yet God is working in all things to bring new life for us and for all of creation.

Your life is not about you. It is about God and what God is doing for us all.

Your life is held in God.

You can let go and trust God who loves you, forgives you, and is always working new life for you and all that God has made.

Let's take a moment for silent prayer