

Reflection | Walking in Paths of Peace at the Intersection of Blessing and Vocation
[Baruch 5](#) & [Luke 1](#) | Knox-Metropolitan United Church
The Second Sunday Of Advent | The Sunday of Peace| December 5, 2021
Regina, SK | Treaty 4 Territory | Cameron Fraser

Video – Kid President – A Letter to a Person on their First Day Here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l5-EwrhsMzY>

Video Transcript

<http://livesoverlap.blogspot.com/2014/01/a-letter-to-person-on-their-first-day.html>

For now, remember this: You're awake. You're awesome. Live like it

Walking in Paths of Peace at the Intersection of Blessing and Vocation

On this second Sunday of Advent

The Sunday of Peace

We are invited to ponder the words of Zechariah

Spoken on the occasion of the naming of his Son

John.

John Who will be known as John the Baptizer (or John the Baptist)

In the Christian Scriptures

John has a ministry of preaching and teaching

Which he exercises in the wilderness

Away from the city centres

People come out to see him

Intrigued by his words and eccentric mannerisms

He invites his followers to fully immerse themselves

In the waters of the Jordan River

As a sign of their commitment to living in just ways

Baptism literally means to immerse

This all occurs in the historical context of crisis
Colonialism under the Roman Empire
Poverty and lack
Community Division
And conflict over who is to blame
The wealthy collude with Rome to take advantage
Further impoverishing the peasantry
And John's ministry is best understood in this context
The writers of the Christian Scriptures
Further frame John's ministry as a precursor to that of Jesus of Nazareth
Drawing on their own cultural religious myths
Of the Hebrew Prophets
Especially Elijah
Who is known as one who prepares the way
For a great act of Divine liberation
John and Jesus are tied
Both in the nature of their ministry
But also by family
John's mother Elizabeth is cousin to Jesus' mother Mary or Myriam
Our Scriptures in two weeks focus on their connection
So what we read today then
Is included in the Gospel of Luke
By means of setting the stage for how John shall be understood
It's important to note that Zechariah
His father is a priest who serves in the Temple

And while serving in the Temple

He is visited by an Angel who tells him he will become a father

To a child he shall name John

This all adds to the drama

For a few reasons

Custom would dictate that the child should take the named of his father

But this child will not

And furthermore Zechariah, as a priest is

A symbol of the establishment

And his son will be anything but

He will in fact stand in outright opposition

He will rail against the establishment of which his father was a part

And he will eventually be killed by that establishment

It's unfortunately far too easy to read this as a Christianity superseding Judaism

And I know I mention this a lot

But it serves repeating

The Jesus of the Christian Scriptures

Is not creating a new religion

Or asserting superiority over Judaism

But calling his people to a radical recommitment to their lineage of liberation

The focus of his critique is the Imperialism of Rome

And his own peoples' collusion or acquiescence

Likewise, John's ministry of challenging the establishment is in fact a very Jewish thing to do

He is very in line with the Hebrew Prophets

As a dramatic symbol of all of this

Zechariah, when told of all this, disbelieves

And as a result, is unable to speak
Until John's birth and dedication
Which includes these words which we've heard this morning,
Zechariah's song
Also called the Benedictus which means blessing
This is a blessing designed
To draw forth a possibility in the one to whom it is given
It is a call
Beckoning a lived response
The video shown at the outset, A kid President is structured similarly
It is full of beauty and whimsy (and corn dogs)
And it ends with clarity

For now, remember this: You're awake. You're awesome. Live like it

In Christian Spiritual Practice

The word Vocation is often used

It comes from the Latin

Vocare – to call, to summon

From which we get voice

Grammatically the vocative case indicates a direct address,

Often accompanied by a need for a response

We use vocational or call language often

We Trust in God

We are Called to be the Church

A theology and spirituality of vocation

Implies the necessity of response

We might extend this to include the term

Responsibility

And Response-Ability – the ability to adequately respond

A spirituality of vocation

Invites awareness to world and a posture of discernment

What response is necessary in such a time as this, in which we find ourselves?

To such circumstances as these, among which we are surrounded/embedded/embroiled?

The United Church *A Song of Faith* works in these terms

<https://united-church.ca/community-faith/welcome-united-church-canada/faith-statements/song-faith-2006>

*God is Holy Mystery,
beyond complete knowledge,
above perfect description.*

*Yet,
in love,
the one eternal God seeks relationship.*

*So God creates the universe
and with it the possibility of being and relating.
God tends the universe,
mending the broken and reconciling the estranged.
God enlivens the universe,
guiding all things toward harmony with their Source.*

*Grateful for God's loving action,
We cannot keep from singing.*

There is a compulsion to respond to the action which we perceive

in the very nature of that which we name as Divine

There is a visceral-ity to that line

We cannot keep from singing

It's a visceral-ity we can see reflected in Zechariah's exuberant words over his child

I was struck this week while pondering

About how Zechariah's call to John

Locates John in a lineage and community

It is directly personally but profoundly communal

John's vocation will come in the context of David, and Sarah, and Abraham

There is allusion of Myriam and Moses

And to the host of the Hebrew Prophets

So John, who will immerse people in the waters of the River Jordan

Which itself is a location steeped in meaning for his people

Will first immerse himself in the lineage of liberation in which he is located

And among the people who carry that collectively

And who long for it in the midst of their collective suffering

He is invited into something that is bigger than himself

But in a way that does not make him small

He is not the proverbial child throwing one star fish back into the ocean

But part of a multitude

All reaching out hands to touch the hurt and bring healing

All lifting voice to proclaim blessing

Because all of this collectively makes response possible

Creates Response-Ability

Blessing and vocation are therefore inseparable in this spirituality

Nadia Bolz-Weber

<https://nadiabolzweber.com/>

Was once speaking about the often-used platitude in church circles

God will never give you more than you can handle

To which she replied – yeah right! I'm always facing more than I can handle

But it was her partner

Himself also a Lutheran Priest

But from Texas

Who offered a way for her to find something more helpful

Because when he repeated this phrase

It came out

God will never give y'all more than y'all can handle

Western Christianity and it's Spirituality

In so many manifestations and articulations

Centres the individual and often reinforces an alienating individuality

But personal is not the same as individual

Thought of in this way

Christian vocational discernment

And developing an awareness of one's own spiritual inclinations

Is profoundly personal

But in the sense that it opens one up to awareness of webs of relationship

And interconnectedness

Building communality

Because vocation and discernment is also about coming to an awareness of the webs of dynamics in which we find ourselves stuck sometimes

Societal patterns

Relational patterns

Seemingly never-ending feedback loops

Vocation is also intimately tied to self-worth and self-regard

A Christian spirituality of vocation requires a discernment of one's beloved-ness

One's essential worthiness

One's own sacredness

And discerning this and resting in this amidst all that discourages and devalues

Amidst all that demands and demeans

This is spiritual work

Often hard spiritual work

In the words of the Kid President

You were made from love, to be love, to spread love.

So thoughtfully re-weaving these threads into a tapestry of wholeness

Is therefore personal and of necessity an act in and of community

That's why Zechariah's blessing

Fluidly moves from the personal to the collective

And while addressed to John himself

Articulating John's own vocational invitation,

Ultimately ends with

Such is the tender mercy of our God,
who from on high
will bring the Rising Sun to visit us,
to give light to those who live
in [confusion and ignorance]
and under the [constant fear of destruction]

and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

So as we end, an invitation to reflect

And perhaps to continue this conversation in another context...

I wonder how you relate to the concept of vocation?

I wonder what that means to you?

I wonder if this piques interest to further explore spiritual practices of discernment and vocation?

How that frames our work

Personal yet collective

Of deepening an awareness of the moment in which we find ourselves

The embodied conditions of our specific context

And discerning

What response is called for in this moment

And how do we curate the ability

To respond

*to guide **our** feet into the way of peace.*

For now, remember this: You're awake. You're awesome. Live like it!