

Planting Hope: Three Questions, Three Answers John 10:1-10

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Before I came to Prince of Peace, I was serving a congregation in Bloomington. My role there was Children, Youth, and Family Ministry Director—so, the whole enchilada of Family Ministry. Well, thanks be to God we were growing and growing fast. So much so that I needed to hire a Children's Ministry Director. The problem was, I had never done that before. So, after I Googled "how to write a job description," I went to the Luther Seminary job board to steal job description ideas. That's when I saw it.

"Family Ministry Director: Full Time: Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Burnsville, MN." So, I did one of these sort of look to the left, look to the right, you know how you do when you're creeping around on LinkedIn, right? and I clicked on it. The job description was a page and a half long: "Staff supervision, program responsibility, leadership team input, fundraising..."

I took a deep breath and that's when I heard it. You know what I'm talking about, don't you? The Voice of Doubt. It's a voice that many of you have heard, are contending with right now in some area of your life, and it is one you will hear should you respond to a nudge from God into mission. But, the good news is this. The same God that calls us into mission has also given us a response to the Voice of Doubt. A Voice of Truth, if you will. More on that later.

We're in the middle of a series about mission, or the outward movement of God's love-filled people into the world, called Planting Hope. So far we've seen the way we're called to our local parish, or to our neighbors. We've also talked about saying yes to addressing global hunger. Later on in our series we'll talk about walking with people struggling with mental health diagnosis, grief, and injustice.

Before we get to the second half of this series, I want to pull us together for a bit of a half-time conversation about the inevitable voice that will meet you on the road to where God is calling you. It's a voice that I've contended for most of my life, certainly when I was

considering applying for my old job here, and it's a voice that has plagued the people of God since the very beginning. It's the Voice of Doubt. Thanks be to God, though, that the voice of doubt doesn't get a monologue. God has given us a response.

Our reading for today comes from one of those moments of doubt in the lives of the early church. Jesus and his disciples were in the midst of a huge crowd of people clamoring to get in close with this would-be messiah. Also in the mix were people from the community who would often sow doubt in the calling of the disciples. In our reading, Jesus calls those people thieves. The good news we find out, is that those that Jesus came to seek and save will hear his voice. They let go of the voices of the thieves, of doubt, and instead listen to another voice, his Voice of Truth. This is how he says it in John 10:1-10.

¹ "Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. ² The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers." ⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. ⁷ So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

The word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Today I want to share with you the three words of doubt that the thieves use to steal, kill, and destroy your calling and the three words of hope I think that Jesus gives us in response. To give our time together some structure and also a human touch, I want to follow the story of a man who went through just such an experience when he was saying yes to God's call in his life.

My friend, Mark Meier, is a corporate accountant by

training and at the time of his God-calling moment, was on the wrong side of middle age. So, naturally God decided it would be a great idea for him to be a founder of a student-led, parent-supported, teacher-advised network of faith clubs in local middle and high schools called Campus Faith Clubs.

Campus Faith Clubs (CFC) now has clubs in nearly 100 schools across Minnesota, Wisconsin and Iowa, and is starting even more every single day. Prince of Peace has been a financial and ministry partner with CFC since 2014. Our students have led clubs, they have facilitated worship events, and have been members of their on-campus groups.

So, for those of you who are reading, who have your hand in the air saying “Here I am, God, send me,” this story is for you. Let’s start at the beginning and the first word of doubt from the thieves Jesus was talking about.

Who do you think you are?

The Bible is filled with stories of God using all the wrong people. Sarah was a senior citizen who had never had a baby. Jesus was a run of the mill kid from Nazareth. Peter was just a fisherman with no formal training. Jesus’ followers were the poor, rich tax collectors, curious Greeks, and Roman centurions. Who do you think you are?!

The first question on my mind when I opened that job description back in 2013 from Prince of Peace was exactly that: Jason, who do you think you are? It is the same question that Mark heard when God gave him the dream of founding Campus Faith Clubs. Let’s hear from him.

(Video - Mark’s story)

How many of you are thinking, “same ” right now? Show of hands. We’ve all been there, we’ve heard that voice that attacks us right at our foundational sense of who we are. It’s a “do not pass go, do not collect 200 dollars” kind of message. But, like I said earlier, the voice of doubt is drowned out by the voice of truth. Remember Sarah? She was too old. Jesus was from the wrong town. Peter was a bull-headed tradesman. Jesus’ followers have always been the “wrong people.” But, the good news, friends, is that in all of these cases, and in your case, too: God isn’t calling just anybody, God is calling God’s own children. In the introduction to his gospel about Jesus, John says this, “But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God...” And at the end of his gospel, these children are the

ones Jesus says will, “do even greater things.” That’s you and me, friends.

So, when the voice of doubt asks, “Who do you think you are?” there’s one response: “I am a child of God.” There is no greater qualification and no further qualification needed.

So what about the second voice. How is this even possible?

Not so long ago I took our team to a conference in Atlanta. While we were there we heard from a speaker that helps people to come up with ideas. That is how he gets paid. Seriously. Anyway, one of the lines from his talk that really impacted me was this, “When someone comes up with a new, audacious idea, resist the urge to ‘how’ it to death. Instead, spend some time with ‘wow!’”

Yep, that means exactly what you think it means. All of your co-workers how’ing your ideas to death are sinners. I’m just kidding. Maybe.

In the early days of listening for God’s voice for this new network of school-based faith clubs, Mark heard the “how” question all the time. Let’s let him tell the story.

(Mark’s story)

Did you hear that? Mark didn’t get asked How? once, he got asked How? a whole bunch of times. And he could have quit, but he didn’t. What makes it worth it to Mark, and to God in the end, whenever we choose to say yes, isn’t that we’re successful all the time, it’s that we walk by faith. And so when someone asks, when the voice of doubt asks, “How is this going to happen?” simply respond, “By faith.”

Now here’s that third voice. What if you fail?

One of the core breakdowns between Jesus and his disciples—and us—is that in order to really respond to God’s call on our story – something has to fail, or as Jesus puts it, has to die. It might be the model you had in your mind for how it would work. It might be your ego or your unwillingness to let other people lead. It might be your resentment for the people causing the problem you’re trying to solve. Mark certainly had those moments of doubt in his story when he wondered if he would fail. Let’s listen in:

(Mark’s story)

So as we heard, failure is often part of the process, but if we can hold failure and faithfulness together, then we put ourselves in a situation to hear our final response: What happens if you succeed?

I think that this is a response, or a mindset that every farmer who has ever planted a seed has had to claim. What if it grows? In spite of all the weeds, droughts, bugs, and whatever that could steal away this seed: what if it grows? What if it succeeds?

Friends, we have been called by God into mission. To be a love-filled people moving throughout the world planting seeds of hope wherever we go. Like Mark has managed to do, and continues to do for these many years, we are called to let go of the voice of doubt so that we can claim the Voice of Truth which tells us that we are a child of God, that encourages us to walk by faith, and above all else, to wonder what might happen if we succeed.

So, I wonder, what's the voice of truth you need to hear today? That you are a child of God? To walk by faith? To ask what happens if you succeed?

As you lean into that question, let the words of this song sink in. (Song: The Voice of Truth)