

“A Wonderfully Glorious and Deeply Troubling Plan for Your Life”

John 12:27-36

May 10, 2020

Faith Presbyterian Church – Morning Service

Pastor Nicoletti

We return again this morning to the Gospel of John.

Last Lord’s Day we began to consider the interactions that came after Jesus’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem, at the time of the Feast of Passover. Two non-Jews came to see Jesus. And from that, Jesus could tell that the hour had come for him to be glorified through the cross.

Last week we considered verses twenty through twenty-six of John chapter twelve, and we focused especially on the nature of glory. We said that true glory comes through serving others, rather than being served by others. We said that the road to glory is one that goes down into self-sacrifice and death-to-ourselves, rather than one that goes up in a self-seeking way. And we said that Jesus leads us, and protects us, on that way, as our king.

This morning’s text – verses twenty-seven through the first half of verse thirty-six – is a continuation of that same conversation, and so the themes will overlap a bit with what we said last Lord’s Day, but it will build on that previous passage and come at its themes from a different angle.

For that reason, and to put our text in context, I will read verses twenty through twenty-six before I read our text for this morning: verses twenty-seven through the first half of verse thirty-six.

With that said, let’s hear now from John chapter twelve, beginning with verse twenty.

Please listen carefully, for this is God’s Word for us this morning.

^{12:20} Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. ²¹ So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” ²² Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³ And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

[And now our text for this morning – Jesus continues:]

²⁷ “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” ²⁹ The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” ³⁰ Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not mine. ³¹ Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” ³³ He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. ³⁴ So the crowd answered him, “We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say

that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?”³⁵ So Jesus said to them, “The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going.”³⁶ While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”

This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.)

“All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.” [1 Peter 1:24-25]

Let’s pray ...

Lord, look upon us and deliver us,
for we do not forget your word.
Be our advocate and redeem us,
and give us life according to your promise.
Great is your mercy, Lord,
and so we ask you to give us life according to your law.
Help us now to love your word,
and give us life according to your steadfast love.
The sum of your word is truth,
and every line of your word endures forever.
And so help us to attend to it now, and grow in your truth,
in Jesus’s name. Amen
[Based on Psalm 119:153-154, 156, 159-160]

Our text this morning focuses on the nature of Jesus’s calling, and, by implication, it also directs our attention to consider the calling of those who follow him.

Jesus began to discuss that calling in the passage we looked at last week – especially verses twenty-three through twenty-six. His calling is to give himself sacrificially for the good of his people. And he adds that that is also the calling of all those who serve him – anyone who is his disciple. His disciples, he says, must follow him where he goes. They must also be willing to die to themselves. They, in some sense, are called to a similar pattern of life as he is. There are differences, of course, but Jesus here emphasizes the unity of the calling he has with the calling he gives to his followers.

And so it is after setting that framework that Jesus goes on to say what he says in verses twenty-seven and twenty-eight.

Hear those verses again:

[Jesus said to them] “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour?’ But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”

And we see two things in these verses and in the verses that surround them.

The first is that God the Father's perfect plan for Jesus both wonderfully glorified God and deeply troubled Jesus.

Let me say that again: God the Father's perfect plan for Jesus both wonderfully glorified God and deeply troubled Jesus.

That's the first thing we need to consider.

The second thing is that Jesus extends similar callings to all who follow him.

Those are the two things Jesus tells us in this passage.

Let's look at those aspects of the text a little more closely.

In verse twenty-seven Jesus says that as he thinks about what lies ahead for him – as he thinks of his calling, God's plan for his life – his soul is troubled. D. A. Carson points out that the word used here is a strong one. It doesn't refer to a light troubling, but a deep troubling. "The verb," Carson writes, "signifies revulsion, horror, anxiety, agitation." [Carson, 440]. Jesus's words here remind us that Jesus was fully human, and he rightly experienced the full range of human emotions, without sin. But I think we have trouble with this.

Docetism was an ancient heresy that claimed that Jesus wasn't *really* human – he only *seemed* human. The ancient Church condemned such a view and firmly asserted the full humanity of Jesus. And few Christians today would be tempted to adopt a full-fledged version of Docetism. But the fact is that we are often tempted towards a sort of semi-Docetism. Of course we believe that Jesus had a real body, and other aspects of humanity ... but some aspects – maybe aspects we struggle to see the good in – *those* we assume Jesus might have *appeared* to have, but he didn't *really* have.

And right here is one place where I think we are tempted in that direction. We might hear Jesus say that his soul is troubled. We might even hear commentators explain to us that the word used here means "deeply troubled" – that it "signifies revulsion, horror, anxiety, [and] agitation." ... and we might imagine Jesus *saying* that ... but we don't imagine him *really experiencing* that. We don't imagine him *actually feeling* those emotions as he contemplated God's calling for him. We tend to act like semi-Docetists.

But that's not a Christian position. It's not a position that takes the Bible seriously.

Jesus was deeply troubled by the road ahead of him that he knew God the Father was calling him to. When he thought of it, he felt revulsion, horror, anxiety, [and] agitation.

He also, at the same time, said that he knew that that path was his calling, and that following it would glorify God the Father, and also bring glory and honor to him – to Jesus – himself. We get that in verse twenty-eight, and also back in verse twenty-three. In verse twenty-eight Jesus declares that he knows that God the Father will be glorified through the cross, and in verse twenty-three he says that he knows that through the cross he himself will also be glorified. [Carson, 441]

So we see that God the Father's perfect plan for Jesus wonderfully glorified God and honored Jesus, *and* that that same plan also deeply troubled Jesus.

And then in verses twenty-five and twenty-six we see that Jesus extends similar callings to all who follow him. In verse twenty-six he said: "If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him."

God the Father's perfect plan for Jesus both wonderfully glorified God and deeply troubled Jesus, and Jesus extends similar callings to all who follow him.

That is what is at the heart of our passage this morning.

The problem is that our tendency is to pull those two aspects of Jesus's calling apart – whether in his life or in our own.

We tend to pull those two aspects of Jesus's calling apart – whether in his life or in our own.

What do I mean by that?

Well, we don't do a very good job holding together the two facts that God's calling can *rightfully* be deeply troubling to the one who is called, and can also *rightfully* be something that glorifies God and honors the individual. Those two things that Jesus brings together here, we tend to tear apart. And that tearing apart can take two forms.

The first form of pulling these two things apart is to say that if something is deeply troubling for us, then it cannot be good, and therefore cannot glorify God or honor us.

And this is a common perspective in our culture. You can find it both inside the Church and outside the Church.

People in our culture, often without thinking about it, hold to an ethic of expressive individualism, in which authenticity is treated as an almost unqualified moral good. What that means is that it is not only the *right* of every human being, but it is their *moral duty*, to determine what they most desire, and then to live in a way that is consistent with that. They need to be authentic to their passions and their desires. They need to look inside, determine who they are and what they want, and then live that out. It's not just an option, it is a duty to live in that way. To live contrary to your desires is to live inauthentically. It is to rob yourself of dignity. And if you add a theological element to that, it is to live in a way contrary to how God made you to be.

And so, in this framework, any calling, any plan for your life that you were to find deeply troubling, cannot be honoring to you and cannot be glorifying to God. Any calling or plan for your life that you find troubling is by necessity inauthentic – it does not line up with your desires. And if it is inauthentic, then it cannot be good. And if it is not good then it cannot be honoring to you or your Maker.

That is one way we can tend to pull apart the two things that Jesus here brings together.

But there is also a second way to basically do the same thing – though in practice it may look very different. The second way is to say that if we know that something glorifies God, and we know that it is for our ultimate good, then we should not be troubled by it.

Let me say that again: The other possible error we can make is to say that if we know that something glorifies God, and if we know that it is for our ultimate good, then we should not be troubled by it.

You should not be troubled by it, and, in fact, being *deeply* troubled by it might be a sign of unbelief or unfaithfulness. A holy man or woman – a faithful man or woman – will be untroubled by whatever God calls them to, because he or she knows that all things will work together for God’s glory and for their final good.

So we have these two patterns here. For a shorthand we might call one the liberal pattern, and the other the conservative pattern. The liberal pattern says: If something is deeply troubling for us, then it cannot be good, and therefore cannot glorify God or dignify us. The conservative pattern says: If we know that something glorifies God, and if we know that it is for our ultimate good, then we should not be troubled by it.

And here, in our text this morning, in two verses Jesus openly contradicts both of those perspectives.

In verses twenty-seven and twenty-eight he looks at the Father’s plan for him, and he says *both* that the Father’s plan will glorify the Father and glorify Jesus himself *and* that Jesus is deeply troubled by it.

And the crowd is confounded by that. They say so in verse thirty-four. They have a category for a Messiah King who glorifies God and who is honored by God ... but not one who at the same time faces a deeply troubling calling like crucifixion. But Jesus confronts them with the truth that despite their expectations, those two things will go together.

And as he does that, Jesus reveals, as C.S. Lewis has pointed out elsewhere, that camps in our culture that we can tend to think of as polar opposites, are often in far more agreement than they realize, and may even be allies against the truth.

Those who adopt what we’ve called the liberal error, and those who adopt the conservative error in our culture tend to think of themselves as opposites – and often they are on opposing sides of moral and cultural debates. But what we see here is that despite their differences, on a deeper level they both agree with one another that whatever plan for our life is good and glorious *should not bother us*.

Which means that both camps here oppose Jesus, who has just declared that he is deeply troubled by God’s good calling for him.

Now, which pattern do you tend towards? Which pattern do you see come up most in your life, or in your thinking, or in your words?

Maybe it's one. Maybe it's the other. Maybe you go back and forth. Maybe your emotions are drawn towards one, while your reason is drawn towards the other. In any case, every one of us sees one or both of these patterns at work in our hearts and in our minds.

This morning, I want you to let Jesus confront however you might be thinking in these patterns.

To help us do that, I want to go through a number of concrete examples where we are tempted to pull apart what Jesus brings together here.

Now, before we do that, we should clarify how our callings that fit this pattern are similar to Jesus's calling that is described here, and how they are different.

What is similar is that we are all called to things that are difficult – to things that we struggle with, things that trouble us, but things that ultimately glorify God and dignify us.

What is different is that Jesus had the specifics of his calling divinely revealed to him, and we do not have that. Of course we do have God's law divinely revealed to us. But the difficult circumstances we may face are not similarly revealed.

And so, in this text Jesus knows he is being called by God to the cross – it is divinely revealed to him. And so he will not avoid that suffering even though he has opportunity to.

That often looks different for us. So, God may call us to suffer for a time from a certain illness, but he has not told us that staying ill is also our calling, and so it is our responsibility, actually, as stewards of the life God has given us, to seek to be made well, even as we endure that illness for a time. Similarly, God may call us to a difficult relationship, but we do not know how long that relationship will be difficult, and we are right to pray and work for that relationship to be healed.

So when I speak of these callings, I am *not* saying that we should not seek to improve our circumstances. I am merely discussing what God *may* call us to for a season, or for a lifetime.

What do some of those callings look like?

Well, we might first consider our calling to keep God's law. And one of the areas where we in our culture especially feel this tension, is, I think, in the area of marriage and sexuality.

Let's consider first the calling to faithfulness in a bad marriage.

Now, before we dig into this area, I need to make one more disclaimer.

There are, of course, situations in which the Bible itself tells us it is a spouse's right to end a marriage through divorce. Those Biblical grounds of divorce are usually categorized under the umbrellas of adultery and abandonment, but many in the Church, including the study committee report of our own denomination, have also recognized that there are sins that break the marriage covenant in similar ways, and to a similar degree, and so give a husband or wife biblical grounds for divorce as well – attempted murder, or forms of physical abuse, are just a couple examples.

Those situations are a tragedy. And when they come up it is the duty of the Church to love and care for those going through such a divorce – not to put restrictions on them that God’s word has not.

But *that* is not what I am talking about this morning.

I’m talking about marriages that are bad, but in which there are no Biblical grounds for divorce.

What I’m talking about is when you are married to someone ... and you don’t like them anymore. Maybe you feel like a bad fit with them. Maybe you feel like they’re just a jerk. Maybe it’s something else. When someone is in a bad marriage – a marriage that, while there are no Biblical grounds for divorce, it still seems that the marriage itself is “for worse” rather than “for better” – how do you tend to view that situation?

The liberal response tends to be to push towards divorce. “If your marriage troubles you,” the reasoning goes, “it cannot glorify God, and it cannot honor you, and so you need to end it. God wouldn’t want you to be troubled in this way. And you’re not being fair to yourself if you stay. What deeply troubles you cannot be glorious.”

The conservative response, while often admitting the initial problems, tends towards minimizing them and acting as if they can be fixed or overcome simply with the right attitude. “If you just *think* of it rightly, if you just *speak* rightly to your spouse, if you just *act* rightly, then you will feel peace and happiness, and you will not be troubled. You won’t be troubled by your spouse, so long as you really believe that you are glorifying God by remaining faithful.”

But the Bible calls us to be faithful to our wedding vows, while also telling us, as is stated over and over again in the Book of Proverbs, that being married to a difficult person can be an incredible burden. The Bible doesn’t pretend that the right attitude will simply overcome the trials of being married to a selfish, or foolish, or difficult person. But it does tell us that the right approach will glorify God, and that God will in turn honor us.

Or we might consider another moral example: the area of same-sex attraction.

The Bible says that all sexual intimacy is to be kept within the covenant of marriage. And the Bible says that marriage is to be between one man and one woman. What then do we say about the man or the woman who experiences exclusive same-sex attraction – who not only is attracted to people of the same sex, but also experiences little or no attraction at all to people of the opposite sex?

The liberal response is simple – it says: “God would never want you to be deeply troubled by resisting your desire to be with someone of the same sex. God would never ask you to contradict your desires in that way. And if you do contradict your desires, then you are dishonoring yourself as a human being, and you are failing to glorify God as well.” If it troubles you, then it cannot glorify God or dignify you.

Unfortunately, the conservative response that I have often come across can be just as simple. Because many conservatives will basically tell people struggling with same-sex attraction that if they *really* seek to glorify God, and they *really* desire to honor him, then their same-sex desires

will go away and new attractions to the opposite sex will eventually emerge. I've recently read statements like that from a well-known Reformed institution – and they are not alone in making such claims. And I want you to see that the underlying pattern of thought there is: If you seek to glorify God, you will no longer be troubled with this difficulty.

But the Bible never says that.

Now, studies have shown that *some* who experience same-sex-attraction and seek to live a Biblical Christian ethic will, within a certain range, see those desires diminish to some extent, and some will see some level of increased desire toward the opposite sex, or maybe towards an individual member of the opposite sex. That happens. But it is far from universal. I know personally and I have also read from Christians with same-sex attraction who desired such changes but have never experienced them.

And the Bible never promises that they will in this life. As far as the attraction to people of the same sex, the Bible promises that if we are faithful, we will grow in our ability to resist temptations. It also says that we will never be tempted beyond what we can bear. But it never promises that a particular temptation towards a particular besetting sin will be taken away from us in this life if we are faithful. If anything, we may get the idea that as our strength grows in fighting a temptation, God may also allow the intensity of the temptations we face to increase as well.

And then, when we consider the other half – the lack of attraction to the opposite sex. It is hard to know how to categorize that. That doesn't sound like a sin. We might wonder: How much is the issue physical – part of the physical brokenness of this fallen world? How much is it mental? How much is it spiritual? In many ways we don't know. But there is no Biblical ground to promise someone that if they love God enough then such attractions will appear.

Instead, the Bible calls us to faithfulness – it calls us to obey God's law – and then it tells us that God is glorified in the one who gives up much to be faithful and obedient to God, and that God will honor those who have given up much in their loyalty to Christ. It is because such a calling can be so troubling that God will so reward it.

In these ways and others this pattern can play out in our calling to keep God's law.

Now, before we go on to other areas where we can see it, I want to acknowledge an objection or a frustration that I imagine has arisen in some of your minds.

And that objection is simple: Who in the world am I to tell others how they should live in these areas? And how do I have the nerve to ask others to make sacrifices that I don't have to make myself? That, you might think, is a perfect picture of privilege: a straight man with a wonderful wife lecturing people who are gay or in bad marriages.

Hold on to that objection. It's an important objection. And we're going to come back to it. So hold on to it, hang in there with me, and we will address it.

But before we get to that, let's consider some other areas where these patterns need to be considered.

We see it in our calling to keep God’s law.

We also see it in our calling to serve those under our care.

We see it in situations where we are called to care for others, but our calling troubles us – either because we feel inadequate for it, or we just find it difficult and unpleasant.

We might experience this in parenting, or in our responsibilities to others at our job, or in having to care for older parents, or in a number of other areas. What happens when we have those responsibilities to others, and we feel inadequate or we find it unpleasant or troubling?

The response, again, on one end is to determine that if we feel that way, then we must not really be called to that responsibility. If we feel like we are not a natural fit to being a stay-at-home parent, then maybe that means we shouldn’t be one. If we find our responsibilities in our line of work outside the home to be burdensome, maybe we should go do something else. We are tempted to equate our true calling with what we find pleasant and what we feel we can do while still within our comfort zone. “Do what you love,” as the saying goes. In other words we feel that God would not call us to, and we should not take onto ourselves, responsibilities that we find burdensome or troubling.

The other response to such callings is to say that if the calling is good, then we should not be troubled by it. You can see a lot of this. It might take the form of advice that says that if you *really* value your children or your family then you will not find parenting at home to be a burden, but simply a joy. Or it might take the form that says that if your vocation outside the home is doing good for others, and if you get paid well, then you shouldn’t experience the responsibilities or difficulties you are given at work as troubling. In other words, if you really value God’s glory, you won’t be troubled by his calling for you.

But again, Jesus, looking at his calling from God, stands in contradiction to both of these perspectives. And Jesus is not alone. Think of Moses. When God decided to rescue his people from Egypt, he sent a man to speak for him, who struggled with public speaking and who really didn’t want the job. That is the kind of God we have – a God who calls people to difficult tasks that often don’t fit them well. Why does he do that? Because by that he is glorified. Because, as the Apostle Paul reminds us, when he works through those who struggle with their calling, then he makes it clear to those who see that we Christians “have this treasure” from him, “in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.” [2 Cor 4:7]

We see it in our calling to keep God’s law. We see it in our calling to our responsibilities. But we also see these patterns emerge in our calling to endure suffering that comes our way.

Suffering comes through sickness, or financial hardship, or loss, or difficulties with mental or emotional health, or broken relationships, or any number of things. And two common responses, again, are either to try to eradicate all pain by whatever means possible, or to tell those suffering that they shouldn’t be troubled by their suffering, because God will be glorified in it and they will be rewarded for enduring faithfully.

And once more, the Bible does not go in either of those directions. The Bible forbids certain acts even if they might reduce or eliminate suffering. And the Bible tells us that Jesus, on his way to glory, cried out and was in anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Finally, to give an example from one more area of life, we also see these patterns play out in how we interact with current events.

There are lots of discussions about what could or should be done better in handling everything going on right now. And I'm sure there are ways we could make improvements. But that's not what I want to talk about. What I want to point out is that it often seems that across the cultural and political spectrum, people can share a similar belief: that it's within our power to keep things like this from happening. In other words, if we were on our game, then we would never have to face troubles like we do now. And so, by implication, we *should* never have to face troubles like we do now – whether medically or economically.

Such things should always be preventable. God would never require us to face a health or financial crisis that we cannot control. He would never allow us to face that level of trouble. Though history is riddled with examples where he has ... we tend to assume that it could not, it should not, happen to us.

Whether in what God's law calls us to, what responsibilities we are given, or what trials we face, in each and every situation we are tempted to pull apart what Jesus brings together. Jesus says that the calling God has given him will glorify God the Father and Jesus himself, and he also says that he – that Jesus – is deeply troubled and distressed by it. And he tells us that he also extends similar callings to all who follow him.

And now we need to address the objection I mentioned a while back: Who am I to require such things of other people?

And this is an objection we need to take seriously.

I mean, think about it: Who am I to say such things?

Here I am, a man with a wife who is unquestionably “for better” for me – who is far better than I deserve (and I'm not just trying to earn some points on Mother's Day – I'm pretty sure that anyone who knows us both well would agree, whether my close friends from seminary, or my own mother) – and yet here I am telling people with a spouse that is to their detriment to stay in their marriage.

Here I am, a man who has never struggled with same-sex attraction, telling people who do, that they may be called to life-long singleness. What privilege!

Here I am, a man who has never dealt with a serious illness or financial hardship himself, telling people that God may be calling them to glorify him in their faithful suffering!

Here I am, a man whose age means he'll probably be okay if he gets COVID-19, and whose vocation allows him to keep working while in lockdown, telling people who are more vulnerable

to medical or economic hardship that God may be at work to glorify himself and honor them through *their* troubles!

Why should you listen to me?

And the answer, we should admit, is that I have no authority in myself that means you should listen to me.

I feel like we Christians are sometimes scared to admit that – but we shouldn't be.

The Bible makes it very clear that some people have harder callings than others – sometimes in a specific area of life, and sometimes in their lives as a whole. God, in his providence gives some more troubling callings than others. Though we should also be careful to note that those he gives more troubling callings to he also gives more opportunity for honor and glory from him – both in this life and in the life to come.

In any case, we should be honest that some callings are harder than others, and that when they are, we have no right in ourselves to tell others what to do, or to act like we've experienced something similar when we haven't.

Christians with great spouses need to stop acting like they know what it's like to live with a crummy one. Christians who have never struggled with same-sex attraction or with the possibility of a life of singleness need to stop acting like they really understand what that is like. Christians who love staying home with their kids or who have always loved their jobs outside the home need to stop acting like they know what it's like for those who find their callings inside or outside the home to be a burden. Christians who have never faced real loss or suffering or depression or anxiety or mental illness need to stop pretending like they know what it's like to go through those things. Christians who are not facing serious medical or financial threats in this pandemic need to stop acting like they are in the same boat as those who are facing such possibilities.

Because the fact is that we don't need to have comparable experiences to speak into others' lives, because we don't need to speak into their lives from our own authority.

What we need to do is point them to the one who *does* understand ... and who *does* have a right to speak.

If you find yourself struggling with a calling from Christ that you find troubling, Christ may, in this life, give you a friend or mentor who truly understands.

But whether he does or not, he never leaves you alone in those callings, because he always gives you himself. And Christ always understands.

The author of the Book of Hebrews writes this about Jesus Christ – he says: “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Jesus, in every respect, has been tempted as we are – has been troubled as we are – has been tempted and troubled far beyond what we ever will be – yet he remained faithful to God’s calling.

And so he can speak into our situation.

He can call us to such troubling but glorious callings. And he can do it not only because he is our Maker, but because he has been there himself. And he did it for our sake. He did it to draw us to himself, as we read in verse thirty-two. Jesus will never call you to take on a more troubling calling for him than the one that he has already taken on for you.

And as you obey his calling, he can help you as no one else can. He can draw close to you with compassion and gentleness, because as the author of Hebrews says, he is able to sympathize with our weakness, and so he wants to give us mercy and grace in our time of need.

He can draw close to us with his power to overcome the challenges we face, because he has already overcome sin, suffering, and death on our behalf.

And he can draw close to us with the ability to forgive us when we fail and fall short, because he is our high priest, and he has already purchased our forgiveness with his blood.

And so, when Christians seek to help others, our calling is not to point them to ourselves – it is not to speak on our own authority – but it is to point them to Jesus, who understands far better than we do.

And when you face a troubling calling yourself, then you too must draw close to Christ.

He knows what you are going through. He knows what it is like to feel alone and troubled facing a hard calling. He knows what it is like to know the right thing you are called to do, and to want to do it, but to also be deeply troubled by it.

And as you draw close to him, he will walk that path with you. He will have sympathy even if no one else around you does. Even as others seem unreliable, he will never leave you nor forsake you.

When all seems dark, he will be the light. And drawing you to himself, he will make you a son or daughter of the light, as you walk with him through the deeply troubling, but also wonderfully glorious plans that God has for your life.

Amen.

This sermon draws on material from:

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