



Letting Nothing Good Go To Waste

1 Samuel 3:19

©Rev. Joyce Shin
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I was a senior in high school when I learned that the Latin root for the word “decision” is *de-caedere*, which means “to cut off.” I remember the conversation I was having when I learned this root. Knowing that I would have to make a decision soon about where to go to college and feeling intimidated by it, I told a friend of the family how I was feeling. She promptly explained, down to the root of the word, why I was feeling this way: Whenever you make a decision, she said, you are cutting yourself off from something else. Yikes! No wonder I was feeling intimidated.

Deciding where to go to college was perhaps the first major decision that I made in my life. For others it may be something else. For my friend, it was the decision to make a career in the military. Perhaps one of the things that distinguishes adulthood from childhood is that, when you are an adult, you have decisions to make. By deciding this, you are rejecting that. By deciding to do X, you are not doing Y or Z.

Seniors, from here on out, you are going to encounter decision-making moments. Sometimes they will look like forks in the road. At those times, you may feel pressure to pick the right road, somehow to know which of the roads is right for you. It is true that we forge our lives by some of the decisions we make. If you were to ask your parents or others whom you might consider to be mentors to narrate their lives, they might tell their stories in terms of those forks in the road, those moments that required decision.

That would be one way to tell our stories. I remember being at one of those decision-making moments that I perceived as a fork in the road. I was nearing the end of my doctoral work and had been preparing myself for a vocation either in ministry or in the academy. Upon making the decision to accept a ministry position at a church, I met with my doctoral advisor to relay the news, a man whom I had always somewhat feared. In speaking with him, I told him what was worrying me. I didn't want that part of me that loves the academic study of religion, the academic questions that I had been pursuing, the body of knowledge that I had been gaining, to go to waste. I didn't want to lose those things. I will always be grateful for his thoughtful response. True to the theologian he is, he said, “Nothing will go to waste. Your life and everything in it belong to God.”

You have heard more than once the psalmist say, “The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.” Do you believe this? Do you believe, with the psalmist, that God, who created the earth, is Lord over all? I ask, because if you really believe this, it will change the way you tell the story of your life. Instead of talking about which forks in the road were met and which roads were taken, about which decisions forged our lives, we might recognize that our lives are not of our own making and to think otherwise would be both an illusion and an impoverishment. The fact of the matter is that no matter how many consequential decisions we make in our lives, we are patients more than we are agents. No matter how active and in charge we think we are, we undergo more than we undertake. It would be an illusion to think otherwise.

It would also be an impoverishment. Our lives are much more than what we forge by our decisions alone. Listen again to how the psalmist speaks of our lives:

O Lord, you have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.
You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
O Lord, you know it completely. . . .
For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. . . .
My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
In your book were written all the days that were formed for me,
when none of them as yet existed.

How impoverished would the sense of our lives be, if we stripped it down to consist only of our decision-making moments? We would surely lose the full picture of our lives - the full picture that God knows so intimately.

In God's economy, nothing is lost. Nothing good goes to waste. Even what the world considers as having no merit, little or no value, even what the world neglects or discards as worthless, God redeems. If God redeems, even resurrects, what we have discarded, then surely our lives can be - our lives *are* - richer and fuller than what we forge by our decisions alone.

There is in the bible a long history of construing our lives in a way that is, I think, more faithful to God's economy, more faithful to the belief that our lives and everything in it belong to God. It is exemplified in the story we read this morning. In it, God calls Samuel and Samuel responds. God takes the initiative and Samuel says, "Here I am, Lord." And when Samuel says to God, "Speak, for your servant is listening," God speaks. Samuel receives God's words so that not one word falls to the ground.

Each of us is called by God. We do not know yet what the full story of our lives will be. No doubt, the decisions you make when you encounter forks in the road will make a difference, but your lives will be more than those decisions. In God's economy, nothing is ultimately cut off. Nothing is ultimately lost. None of God's words fall to the ground and go to waste. Because in all things, including your life and mine, through all things, and for all things, God is redeeming the world.

