

A Reluctant Pastor (By the Grace of God)

Sometimes, I feel acutely and painfully, my failures as a Pastor!

If failure is too strong of a word (and I am not sure that it is too strong), then inadequacies and bumbings and stumblings are certainly appropriate.

Eugene Peterson's, The Pastor: A Memoir, has been a time for much personal reflection and prayer about my pastoral vocation.

You know . . . I never planned on being a pastor. There were two reasons.

First, I wasn't that impressed with the local churches I visited in my early years as a Christian (save the one that I eventually joined). Second, I was even less impressed with the pastors I met in my early years. There were only two pastors that I liked and respected. (One of them being my former and current "boss," pastor and friend – is pretty unusual to have one person in all three roles).

It wasn't anything personal about most of the pastors I met in those years. It was just, how they pastored, the "act" of pastoring, the "work of pastoring" . . . they just seemed cut from a very different cloth than I was. What they did and how they did it . . . seemed weird.

Here is what is funny. As I type pastored and pastoring in the above paragraph and then again in this one, my spelling checker automatically retypes those words as pastured and pasturing. Pastor – it is an odd vocation. As I retype these words to they say what I want them to say, they are now underlined in red to indicate they are misspelled words! 😊

(And I need to mention, along the way I have met many wonderful pastors... some who read this blog from time to time, so I hope I do not offend any of you.)

And me . . .

I was/am much more naturally a teacher (confirmed by my Strengths Finder 2.0 tests) and a leader. And as the decades have ambled on, I have become a mentor/coach and a spiritual director as well. Some would say I do those roles/works well. From time to time, I feel the need to be a prophet, albeit a curmudgeonly one. Most people are glad I don't feel that need too often.

I have a passion for the people group known as leaders; many of whom are pastors and missionaries. To and for that tribe, I am drawn and committed. I have offered my life to the work of forming and shaping their lives. Resourcing them with what is needed if they are to finish well that particular race (2 Timothy 4:7).

- For 20 years, I have studied leadership and the training of leaders.
- For almost 30, I have studied the arts of teaching, training and communication, along with the chosen subjects I most like to teach.
- For a dozen years I have been immersed in spiritual formation and direction.
- For that entire time, I have been interested in missiology, both global and local.

Leader, Trainer, Teacher, Mentor, Strategist, Occasional Prophet, Missionary (non-residential), Missiologist, Spiritual Director – all those roles and titles feel natural and fit well. Vocationally, this is a large part of who I am.

But PASTOR . . .

That ancient, mysterious, odd vocation – Pastor.
I wear that role reluctantly . . . as an uncomfortable garment.
Maybe that is why God continues to call me to wear it.
For in that role, I am least adequate . . .

And in my inadequacy, that is where I must throw myself at the feet of Christ for mercy; beg forgiveness (I recently did lectio divina work through Ezekiel 34 – gulp!); intercede for unnatural wisdom and unworldly unction; and daily long for necessary grace, apart from which, I am utterly helpless (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

I know this. In my struggles to be a Pastor, I have come, as the years lengthen, to love the church more than ever. One of the two reasons why I didn't want to be a Pastor, is now the second greatest motivation for being a Pastor.

I have come to believe that the local church is where we practice best that long, slow, halting, messy obedience in the same direction, as we become more of Who We Are – a people who belong to God.

I love that about our church (LWCC). It is a place of great grace and a place where we deeply value community, transformation and mission. By God's grace (again) we are doing those things reasonably well.

When Becky and I were in our pre-marital counseling and as we celebrated our wedding, two ideas (among others) were on our minds.

Grow old with me, the best is yet to be . . . (my aging, creaky bone remind me that getting older is not all it is cracked up to be...)

And,

For better or for worse . . .

This is covenantal commitment Becky and I have with one another.

These are also good words for the church.

It is a place to call home, family, community, my people.
It is a place to grow old together with others.
It is place to experience the – for better and worse and the shaping of our lives through that better and worse.

This is the place where leaders named Pastor are called to live their vocation.

This is the place (and not the seminary) where we truly learn our vocation (at best, seminary is Intro 101, and sometimes we must unlearn much of what was taught there).

This is the place where Pastors practice their own, long vocational obedience in the same direction.

This is the place where we learn to run with the horses and not grow tired (Jeremiah 12:5).

This is the place where we grow older with the people we love, nurture and guide.

This is the place where we, like the Velveteen Rabbit, maybe, just maybe, through love given and received, become real.

So even though I wear that Pastoral garment uncomfortably, I continue to wear it. And the Patient Tailor allows me to wear it as He fits my life to match that good cloth.

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