

Even though school vacation just started this week and summer has only begun, in the church office we've been focused on next year for months. There's nothing like meeting on a 98 degree day to talk about next Advent! Among other exciting things, we're making plans to have Christian formation opportunities available for all ages on Sundays next year – children, teens and adults. We'll be adding a Sunday morning youth program for both middle and high school, hopefully a new youth group for middle school and an exciting new confirmation curriculum. We're also hoping to initiate regular adult formation every Sunday as well as at other times. That's a lot of new stuff, and so the staff, vestry and others have been really busy recruiting people to help with all this.

Of course, when you ask someone to do something, you need to sell them on the idea of getting involved. And it's helpful to understand that there are four main types of motivation for people: political, economic, emotional and spiritual.

Political motivation is when someone does what is asked of them to avoid an external threat from authority. For example, people avoid breaking traffic rules because if they do, they'll get a ticket. The church can use political motivation, too. We could try telling people that they'll burn in hell if they don't help with the youth group. I don't think that would go over so well, though. More subtly, we could do something like ask the vestry to make it a church policy that all parents with teens are required to volunteer in the youth program, and if they don't, their children won't be allowed to be in the program. Although in its way political motivation can be an effective method, it always achieves compliance from fear. People do what is asked out of fear of the consequences if they don't, and there's not much in it for them except the avoidance of a punishment of some kind. Therefore it's not really the best church model.

People are economically motivated when they weigh the costs and benefits of what is being asked of them and decide that the benefits of saying yes outweigh the costs. Under economic motivation, for example, you may stay at or under the speed limit because you know that it'll conserve gas and save money. With economic motivation, there's something in it for you. In church, people might think, "If I help out the Sunday morning youth program, my own children will benefit. And if we grow a good youth program here, the church might grow and that will help our finances." We can appeal to potential church volunteers by telling them about all benefits a program will have – for the kids, the teachers, the leaders, for the church - for them - and hope that those benefits will convince the recruitee to say yes. Economic motivation is a very logical way to get people to at least buy in to something. But in our consumerist society, where this seems to be the prime motivation behind almost everything, this, too, is a poor model for the church.

Emotional motivation is when someone realizes that if they say yes to something that is being asked of them, it will feel good. Someone who begins to drive more slowly to save money might realize that it feels really good to be part of saving the planet. They may find that being the one everyone passes on the Merritt gives them a positive self image. So they not only drive well, they often become active advocates for the slower driving way. We can hope that people who would work in church ministries would feel inner satisfaction from what they do - when they get to witness a light bulb go off over the head of a teen during a meaty conversation for example, or when they lead a popular new adult small group or enjoy the camaraderie of the leadership team. It's great in church when people say yes from a sense of emotional motivation because they are not just conforming or complying with a request. They are willingly participating and recognize the value for themselves of that participation and advocate the work to others.

But there is one crucial factor missing from an emotional motivation, and that is addressed by the fourth and most mysterious kind of motivation – spiritual. Spiritual motivation is what the church aspires to, even though it may only be experienced in glimpses. Spiritual motivation goes beyond conformity, compliance or even enthusiastic participation. It goes beyond any kind of getting or giving at all. Spiritual motivation arises out of a sense of call. A calling is something you realize you simply just cannot not do. It is the faithful response to a transformational experience of God in your life. When you have personally experienced that God loves you and guides you and strengthens you and protects you, you feel called to find ways to channel that awareness through yourself and out to others through tasks that you are somehow uniquely suited for. So that, as Paul put it, the life you live is lived to God.

How do you recognize a calling? Well, sometimes a calling creeps up on you slowly and gradually – you just find yourself thinking and thinking about going back to school later in life, for example. You keep putting it out of your mind and finding all kinds of good reasons that you really can't do that, but it just won't go away. A calling is like that. It keeps dogging you. It keeps popping up. You keep telling it, "I could never do that" but the idea just won't quit.

Or sometimes a call hits you suddenly, like that lightning bolt that hit St. Paul on the road to Damascus. All of a sudden your eyes are opened to the naked truth and you suddenly see clearly what you're going to have to do. And it just might be something very challenging. It might even bring life altering change. It certainly did for Paul. After a career of persecuting the Christian heretics, Paul suddenly knew he was called to devote his life to spreading the good news of Jesus Christ. This must have been quite a shock to him, not to mention his family, who were fine upstanding Roman citizens and Pharisees. "How can you say that the law means nothing to you, Saul? Does our family's tradition and teaching mean so little? You have rejected us!" I think Paul understood all too well what it meant when Jesus said that he came not to bring peace to the earth but a sword – one that sets a man against his father.

Since a call can be like a sword it is something you may try to repress because it seems so impossible to carry. A calling is often inconvenient. It can really mess up your plans. Yet it is also something that you feel you cannot not do because you know it is the right thing, even though it may make you feel vulnerable and exposed. It would certainly be a lot safer to keep your light under a bushel. But Jesus says to us, "Have no fear. Nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops! Do not fear. Do not be afraid to answer my call! I will equip you, I will support you and I will be with you."

Truly, experiencing a call may feel like you are about to lose your life as you know it. If I say yes to this, things might never be the same. But despite the seemingly daunting challenges, answering God's call in fact brings a level of joy and purpose that no other motivation can touch. Those who hold on to their own life will lose it, while those who lose their own life for his sake will find it!

Paul said, "Don't follow the law to avoid punishment from an authoritative God or out of the fear of hell. Don't follow it to get benefits for yourself like those Pharisees who get admiration for praying on street corners do. Don't follow God's way because it makes you feel good about yourself and gives you an identity. Don't just follow the law, live the law. Christ shows us how, because he is the fulfillment of the law, and as disciples of Christ, we follow his way simply because we are God's and can do nothing else. We have been adopted as God's own children. And through baptism into Christ, we have been made, like Christ, dead to the sinful ways of this world and alive to God. As the body of Christ we have all been raised with him from the dead by the glory of the Father so that we too might walk in newness of life.

Newness of life. Do not fear – God is always making all things new – you, me and us. So when you look around the church and see the many important ministries you could get involved in, try to listen for God's call to you deep inside. Allow yourself to feel how God has uniquely touched you and loved you to imagine how you are being called to show that love to others. God has called you here to Christ and Holy Trinity Church – each and every one of you – called you here to discern your place in the Kingdom. God calls each cell in the body of Christ – each of us – to ministries of healing or of teaching or of caring or of leading. God is calling us to use our time, our talents, our bodies, our lives - to incarnate the Body of Christ and walk with him in newness of life.

So let us pray: May we at Christ & Holy Trinity Church allow God's call to unfold within us and emerge through us and keep an alive and vibrant faith alive among us all, to the glory of God's name. Amen