



April 8, 2013

Dear Friend,

Blessed Easter to you! We are writing to you about a scholarship for publicly-identified lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer Lutheran seminarians.

Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries expands ministry opportunities for publicly identified LGBTQ rostered leaders who are changing the church and society through their ministry. We are the custodian of an endowment fund established in 1995 to honor the memory of Joel Raydon Workin. Joel was one of the three gay seminarians who were refused ordination in 1989 after “coming out” to their candidacy committees. This act of faithfulness was the spark that ignited our movement of resistance within the ELCA and part of what led to the August 2009 change in ELCA ministry policies.

Each year, Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries names a **Joel R. Workin Memorial Scholar**. This award comes with a financial scholarship to a LGBTQ seminarian who embodies Joel’s passion for justice and faith in his or her life and ministry. In addition, the Scholar will be invited throughout the year to be involved with various ELM activities.

2013 marks the 18th anniversary of Joel’s passing from AIDS. This year, ELM will award a \$1,000 grant to a seminary student who meets the eligibility criteria and submits a qualifying application. This will be the sixth year that a Joel R. Workin Memorial scholarship has been awarded. Previous recipients include the Rev. Jen Rude, Matt James, the Rev. Julie Boleyn, Laura Kuntz, Emily Ewing, Rebecca Seely and Asher O’Callahan.

**Eligibility** – The eligible student must be a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer seminary or divinity school student who has demonstrated gifts for ordained or rostered lay ministry and seeks to fulfill their vocation as a publicly identified LGBTQ Lutheran rostered leader. The student must be a member of **Proclaim**, the professional community of publicly-identified LGBTQ Lutheran pastors, seminary students and rostered lay leaders. Proclaim is a program of Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries. Please see the attached membership form for Proclaim if you are not currently a member.

*(Continued)*

The scholarship committee welcomes applications from current seminary students who have applied in prior years!

**Application Materials** – To be considered for the award, your completed application must be submitted to the scholarship committee no later than **Friday, May 10, 2013**.

- Please provide a copy of your current resume that contains an overview of your academic and employment history.
- Attached are several essays and sermons that are included in Joel's book, "Dear God I am Gay – thank you." Please select one of the attached pieces and write a 1-2 page reflection.
- The Joel R. Workin Memorial Scholar should be someone whose character and abilities are consistent with Joel's legacy. Among these are: academic excellence, personal and professional integrity, courage in response to the church's discriminatory policies, a passion for social justice, faithfulness to Jesus Christ and potential to become an effective leader in church and society. Please provide one letter of recommendation from someone (professor, pastor or other rostered professional) who can testify to your qualifications specific to this honor and award. The recommendation letter should be printed on official organizational letterhead.

**Deadline** – The deadline for submitting your resume, reflection paper and one letter of recommendation is **6:00 pm EDT on Friday, May 10, 2013**. All application materials must be submitted electronically to [director@elm.org](mailto:director@elm.org). Please put "Joel R. Workin Scholarship Application" in the subject line.

**Notification and Presentation** – The scholarship committee will notify applicants of its decision on or before May 29, 2013. This date is significant as it is Joel's birthday. The 2013 Joel Workin Scholar will then be publicly announced and the \$1,000 grant presented.

On behalf of the Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries, Joel's family and friends, and the members of **Proclaim**, we commend this opportunity to you and invite your application. We hope that you will consider honoring Joel's memory in this way. Please contact Amalia Vagts at [director@elm.org](mailto:director@elm.org) if you have any questions.

May your Easter season be filled with joy and peace!

Sincerely,

The Joel R. Workin Memorial Scholarship Committee  
Greg A. Egertson , Rev. Jeff R. Johnson , Michael Price Nelson,  
Rev. Jen Rude and Amalia Vagts

## Joel Raydon Workin Memorial Scholarship for LGBTQ Seminarians



**Joel Raydon Workin** (1961-1995) was born in Fargo, ND, and grew up on a farm in nearby Walcott. He took his diploma at Kindred High School in Walcott, received his Bachelor of Theology from Carlton College, Northfield, MN, and his Master of Divinity from Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, Berkeley, CA. In 1986 Joel interned at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Inglewood, CA. In the fall of 1987, Joel came out publicly as a gay candidate for the ordained ministry and was certified for call by the American Lutheran Church (a predecessor body to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America). Following this courageous and faithful act, Joel's certification was revoked by the ELCA and his name was never placed on the roster of approved candidates waiting for call. Joel's ministry continued in Los Angeles, however, at the AIDS Healthcare Foundation and as Director of Chris

Brownlie Hospice. On December 30, 1988, Joel married Paul Jenkins, whom he loved. Joel was a member of St. Matthew's Lutheran Church, North Hollywood. He and Paul were active in Lutherans Concerned/Los Angeles and Dignity/Los Angeles. Paul died of AIDS on June 6, 1993.

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Joel loved to read, to dance, to play the piano and to sing. An avid gardener, he took pleasure in renovating the duplex he and Paul purchased in the Silverlake district in 1990. He enjoyed traveling, especially to any city where "Angels in America" was playing. He loved his family and his friends; he also loved debating, discussing and exploring a wide range of ideas. His wit and humor, keen mind and gentle spirit, and his love of life are sorely missed and fondly remembered.

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In the last weeks of his illness, Joel gave his friends and family permission to sponsor an endowed memorial fund in his name. **The Joel R. Workin Memorial Scholarship Fund** was thus established upon Joel's death from AIDS on November 29, 1995. In keeping with Joel's wishes, awards from the fund are used to provide scholarships to publicly-identified lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer seminary students who seek to change the church and society through their ministry. The fund is managed by **Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries**, through the Lutheran Community Foundation.

THE INSTALLATION OF PASTOR JEFF JOHNSON  
Sermon on the Third Sunday After Epiphany/January 1990  
First United Lutheran Church, San Francisco  
Text: Matthew 4:12 – 23

*(This sermon was preached at the installation of Jeff Johnson, following his irregular ordination on the previous day. Joel preached without notes. This is a transcript of his sermon with some editorial adjustments.)*

We are here today to embark on a great adventure. It is an adventure, as Lynn Siegel said to me yesterday, that's a long time coming. Centuries in coming. And as I was trying to recall - and maybe you can comment on this, Jeff - when I first heard word about these ordinations, it was last summer and the tentative date was Reformation Day. And if we had been gathered here on Reformation Day, our theme would have been courage, renewal, and we would have used phrases like "Here we stand." We would have celebrated the radical Gospel heritage that is ours as Lutherans, as heirs of Martin Luther. But the ordinations didn't happen on Reformation.

The next time that would have come around would have been Advent, the four Sundays before Christmas. If we had been gathered here on Advent, our theme would have been hope and expectation and repentance. We would have celebrated a foretaste, a little sneak preview in these events, of what the future of the Church would be like. Because what's going on here is God's future for the church. But the ordinations didn't happen in Advent.

They didn't happen during Christmas when we would have celebrated incarnation.

But yesterday - at last - on the second Saturday after Epiphany, it happened. And today, on the third Sunday after Epiphany, we are here and our theme is light and darkness. This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine!

Today we celebrate the Epiphany, the manifestation, the appearance, the coming out of God and God's light into the world. If ever there was a sign of God's love breaking in on our often dark horizons, certainly that explosion of light yesterday and the events of this whole weekend are signs of that. And if I can be allowed this paraphrase of the national anthem, what's going on here is like a bomb bursting in air, giving proof through our long dark night that our God is still there!

As we gather here, our text for today is Matthew's account of the beginning of Jesus' ministry, the beginning of God's coming out into the world, God's light coming to us in the person and the actions of Jesus. We are here to celebrate and remember another ministry which is beginning: the ministry of Jeff at this church. That, too, is a sign, an appearance, an epiphany in anticipation of God's light into the world.

But before I go on and make grand and glorious comparisons between Jeff and Jesus - which *is* why he asked me here today - we need to take a cue from our text and start out with something a little more sobering.

"Having heard that John had been arrested..." That's how, according to Matthew, the story of Jesus and his ministry begins.

Now I will grant you that John is not a major character in this story in our Gospel text today. But he's there, and it seems for some reason that Matthew thinks it's important for us to know that while Jesus is beginning his ministry of light, John is sitting in the darkness. For some reason, Matthew thinks it's important that we know that, while the prophecies of Isaiah are being fulfilled, and while Zebulun and Naphtali are basking in God's glorious light, John has been arrested and is in prison. The significance of this is not really clear.

But let me suggest this: John, for Matthew, was the last of the great ones. And like the great prophets, like Isaiah and his prophecy of light shining in the darkness, John pointed to someone else. He pointed beyond himself to another - to Jesus. To the Light. That's what John did. That's what all great prophets do.

But as the last of the great prophets, John was in some ways the end of an era. Something was coming to a close while something new was beginning, and the arrest of John signals for Matthew the end of the old, and a new beginning with Jesus the Light coming into the world.

Let me also suggest that for us here today, John is Matthew's reminder to us of the men and women who have gone before and pointed beyond themselves to this very day. John is a symbol for us of the men and the women, the gays and the lesbians, the clergy and the laity - and I am so bold to count Jim Lancaster and myself among them - who have pointed ahead to this day.

Having quoted from one national anthem, now let me read to you some lyrics which some have called the Black national anthem:

*We have come over a way that with tears has been watered.*

*We have come treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered.*

*Out from the gloomy past, till we now stand at last,*

*Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.*

These words bring us back to light. But remember John. He'll be back later.

So - Jesus and Jeff. (We talked about the other J, and that was John.) Now this story from Matthew - parts of it make sense, but there are parts of it that are hard for us to relate to. The stuff about the prophecy being fulfilled and the Light coming into the

world, we can all sort of relate to that. We know what it's like to be in darkness and to have revelations and to have God break into that. And we know what this Gospel of the realm of the kingdom is, because that's what we preach. That's what ministry is about. That's what Jeff's ministry is about, and this congregation's ministry, and LLGM, and the ministry of all God's people. Our ministry is about preaching the Good News of the realm of heaven.

But then there is this stuff about "Follow me." I think there's something about that that doesn't always jibe with our everyday experience. "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of women and men." That's what Jesus says to Peter, Andrew, James and John. He comes out of the desert, walks down to the Sea of Galilee, says twelve words, and they up and follow him, right? Twelve words, and they up and leave their jobs, their livelihood, their family, their friends, and up and follow Jesus! It just seems a little improbable to me. A little strange - let alone something we can relate to.

Imagine you're out in front of your little coffee shop in the Castro sweeping the sidewalks and this guy walks by and says, "Follow me, and I will make you a sweeper of women and men." You'd think that's a little odd, right? I mean, if you actually dropped your broom and went after him, and left your business and your home and your family behind, I'd think you're a little strange too! Like I said, it's hard enough to believe, let alone relate to.

This guy, just out of seminary, comes along and says, "Follow me," and we will establish a Lutheran ministry of, by, and for gay and lesbian people. Now I admit it's more than twelve words later, but I stand here today in front of a congregation which has up and followed. I stand here today in front of a congregation which has left the order

and the rules behind, which has left harmonious relations with fellow Lutheran congregations behind, and up and followed. I stand here today in front of a congregation which is united with people, many of them here from across the country who have committed their energies, their monies, their very lives and security to this idea, this thing which we call LLGM - people who today installed as their pastor this strangely ordained guy into this strange ministry that is going to make it by a wink and a prayer, that is tenuous at best. But here we are, and we're doing it. And I thought that Peter, Andrew, James and John were weird!

But their story is not a strange story. Their story is *our* story. The Light has come into the world, and we, the people of Light, are addressed by the Light: "Follow me." So like Peter, Andrew, James and John, we up and we follow and we preach the Gospel of the realm of the kingdom.

A few weeks or months after John was imprisoned, he sent some of his disciples to Jesus (I told you that John would be back) and they had a question for him. They asked him this: "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?"

Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk. Lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear. The dead are raised, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me."

Jim and I are headed back to LA tonight. But in a few weeks, or months, or a year, we'll call or we'll write or we'll come up, and we'll ask someone, "So is this the one, or should we look for another? Is this God's light breaking into the world, or should we look for another?" So tell Jim, tell Joel, tell John what you hear and see. In fact, I



hear that there is a representative of the bishop's office here today, you don't have to identify yourself, but you can tell that fox, too!

Tell him that the Lutheran churches are filled to the brim. Tell him that we're preaching the Gospel to gay and lesbian people and to all God's people. Tell him that light is exploding in the Lutheran church across the country. Tell him that on Reformation Day we will stand and say, "Here we stand. We can do no other." Tell him that during Advent, we will celebrate this breaking into the world, this foretaste of God's future. Tell him that during Epiphany, we, the people of the Light, will burst forth from darkness. Tell him that during Lent we will follow that Light no matter what the cost, *no matter what the cost*. Tell him that during Easter, we know that that Light will burst out of that closet, the tomb, and will shine stronger and brighter than ever, and nothing, nothing, *nothing* will stop that Light. Tell him that all of God's people are gathered around this great welcome table!

There's an old hymn that I learned from God's people down in Inglewood at Holy Trinity, and it goes,

*I have decided to follow Jesus!*

*No turning back, no turning back!*

So you tell John, Jim, Joel, and the bishop. You tell the world that we have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back. No turning back.

Amen.

## NEW BEGINNINGS

*Sermon on the First Sunday after Epiphany / January 1985*

*Texts: Psalms 45:7-9; Isaiah 42:1-7; Acts 10:34-38; Matthew 3:13-17*

Today, the Baptism of our Lord, is a day of many beginnings. Today we remember the beginning of Jesus' ministry, which was initiated, Mark tells us, with Jesus' baptism by John. Only a few weeks ago was Christmas, the beginning of Jesus' life; one week ago was Epiphany, the beginning of Jesus' appearances to the Gentiles, and in the second lesson for today we read of the beginning of the apostles' ministry to the Gentiles. The new year, 1985, began a short time ago. Today recently began, as did our service, and this sermon.

Beginnings are everywhere. You are beginning to wonder what I am going to talk about, and on this day of beginnings, I want us to reflect on our own beginnings and on the fact that we are always beginners.

On the island of Shikoku, one of the islands that make up the nation of Japan is a circular pilgrimage route, first traveled, so the story goes, by Kobo Daishi. There are eighty-some temples on the island that are markers of the pilgrim trail, and the *Henro*, the pilgrims, starting wherever they please, essentially circle the island on their pilgrimages, visiting each of the temples in turn. This pilgrimage has no end, but it is ever beginning. The pilgrim can say that he or she completed the whole route when the original starting point is reached, but even then the pilgrim has not so much arrived at an ending, but rather at a place from which to start again.

Our lives, I think, are like the Shikoku pilgrimage. Somewhere, somehow, sometime, we were baptized and this baptism sets us on a pilgrimage. From that time on we are beginners every day, every moment, as we attempt to live as baptized children of God. Isaiah's servant prophecy, which was fulfilled in Jesus, concerns us, too; for in our baptism we have God's spirit upon us. God has called us in righteousness and has taken us by the hand.

The trouble is that we often do not really like to be beginners. On the endless journey upon which God is leading us, on that endless pilgrimage of Shikoku, being a beginner means that we won't always have all the answers. It means that we must ever be open to God and God's leading, willing to learn something. How much easier it would be to just arrive somewhere and have everything settled. No more questions, no more novelty.

Peter, in today's lesson, shows us what it is like to lead the life of a beginner. Now, Peter was not really much on being a beginner. Just as things were going well in his preaching to the Jews in various parts of Israel, Peter starts to have these strange dreams about eating animals which Jewish dietary laws clearly forbid him to eat. "Surely no, Lord," Peter replies to the very idea of his sitting down to a ham dinner, but Peter is told in the dream not to consider unclean what God created clean. It takes three times through, but Peter finally gets the message. He goes to the house of Cornelius, a Gentile, and there baptizes Gentiles and thus begins the mission of the church to the entire world, Jews and Gentiles alike.

Peter's announcement that "I now perceive that God shows no partiality," is the statement of a beginner. Previously, Peter was a prisoner to old ways and old laws; old preconceptions blinded him to the light of God's teaching. But Peter became a beginner who was open to the new thing which God was speaking to him. God broke down the walls which threatened to enslave him and that same God, who sent Jesus to be a light to the Gentiles, called Peter and the early church to smash down the walls that would separate Jew from Gentile. It was, then, not only the Gentiles who needed to see the light, but Peter and the early church as well; for they needed to realize that God indeed does not show favoritism.

The light of Christ has come to give us a new beginning and to make us beginners. Without a beginner's mind, a mind open to God's leading, Peter would have been a prisoner, and so, too, are we prisoners when we do not have beginner's minds.

For what kind of minds do we really have, what are we really like? Are we like God's servant who does not shout or cry out or raise a voice in the street? Do we have in us a mind that does not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but humbles itself? Are we open and humble before God, acknowledging our ignorance and preconceptions? Are we listening to God's call no matter how new, how seemingly strange or novel?

Or are we, instead, prisoners of past ideas and old conceptions? Do we choose the darkness because it is familiar rather than the light which is unpredictable and breaks in upon us new at every moment? Are we captives of security rather than slaves to the freedom of God?

It is so much easier to know, to know what is going on and to feel at least a bit in control. It would have been so much easier for Peter if God would have just followed the old rules. Wasn't it enough of a new thing that Christ came to the Jews? Why does God have to keep pushing and pushing? 'Round and around Shikoku we go, never an end in sight, never a place to stop and say, "Finally, we have arrived." If only we could set up a little prison of security somewhere. But every time we do, God shatters it: "Truly, I perceive that God shows no partiality." Blind eyes are opened, captives are set free. Security comes only in being led by God.

We are all prisoners, I think, to so many things, refusing and unwilling to be beginners, always trying to stay protected and secure in our dark dungeons.

It was during my freshman year at college that I remember God beginning to blast away at some of my prison walls. Before being bombarded with all the ideas that I faced at school, before the New Testament course and hearing about form criticism, text criticism, and the synoptic problem, I was fairly secure in my beliefs. Former presidents of the Walcott Luther League usually do, you know, have it pretty together religiously. But to have everything that I held dear called into question and from all sides, was a very frightening and growing experience. "So the Bible was *really* written down by human beings, people with prejudices and an editorial point of view just like I might have. So this book and my religion do not have guarantees but ask that I trust in God and in

God's workings through humanity." Slowly and sometimes painfully, my eyes opened a bit to the power of God and God spoke to me through classes, professors and friends.

And the great paradox of this whole liberating, un-prisoning process, the process of becoming a beginner, is that just as my prison walls enslave others, so too does my freedom free others, and grant them a new beginning.

Peter and the early church's captivity to the old law would have meant darkness for the Gentiles, but the church's new beginning meant light to the Gentiles. My captivity to some sort of mystical view of scripture meant the imprisonment, the boxing in, of God. It was only as the walls crumbled down around me that the box into which I had placed God also began to crumble.

In our freedom, then, we set others free. By becoming beginners, we give others, also, the chance to begin.

I am a slave to white middle-class America; its values, ethic and beliefs are more a part and parcel of my being than I even know. Only when that imprisonment ends will the oppressed, the black, the poor, the brown, the disabled find the chains which bind them loosened and be given a real beginning.

I am a slave to a male dominated-and-oriented society-and-religion and when the darkness and constriction of that system is lifted, then will women and God be freed from the darkness in which they are being held.

I am a slave to my own selfish interests, wants and desires. I kill conversation by worrying about papers I have to write or books I have to read. I blacken the accomplishments of others by my greed and envy. I am deafened to God's call by the shouts of my own passion. And until I am freed from this bondage to self, until I can live fully in the present God-given moment, my presence will not bring light but darkness to meals, friends, to any situation.

We are all slaves to something, many things, and by our enslavement, we enslave others as well. Opportunity for beginning surrounds us but we sit in our encrusted security, unwilling to begin or give others the chance to begin.

It is into this frozen situation that God, Our Beginning, Our Alpha, comes. God, who sent God's Son to enlighten our darkness and loose our chains, says, "I will take you by the hand. I will put my spirit upon you and you will begin your ministry of new beginnings, of setting prisoners free and being yourself set free."

Everyday God calls us to the pilgrimage we began at baptism. We begin again each moment. Even though it seems that we have been around the island of Shikoku so many times, that we have been to all the temples before, God says, "Here, I will take you by the hand, my little beginner, and with my guidance you will see the light and will be a light. I will show you new things, and old things in a new way. Do not be a prisoner to the past, to the way you and I related to one another years ago or yesterday. I take you by the hand today, now; follow me. You are empowered by my Spirit to be ever beginning so that you can give others new beginnings."

"Do not try to be big stuff. I am the teacher, you are the beginner. Do not expect all the answers, but be glad that I give you the strength to ask and to live the questions which so many prisoners do not dare even to ask. Do not expect security or an easy life either. You were baptized into the death of Jesus Christ and in your life you will know the suffering of that body, given for you. You have no security except to be led by me.

"Sometimes you will fail, you will choose darkness over light, the security of prison over the uncertainty of freedom and beginning, but there is no darkness which is dark to me, no prison which has walls that can keep me from you. For you were baptized into the power of Christ's resurrection, too, not only into his death. And you share in the wholeness and hope of that resurrected body, given for you.

“I, the eternal beginning, the Alpha, have made you my eternal beginner. Everyday and every moment, I take you by the hand and whatever your darkness and whatever your dungeon, I will help you live fully and freely, open to the present, its teaching, its potential, its meaning. I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness. I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and make you to be a covenant for the people and a light; I will open your blinded eyes and will free you, a captive, from prison; I will release from the dungeon you who sit in darkness.

“And led by my hand, strengthened by my grace, and called by my Spirit, you will do the same for others. You, my light, will be a light. You, my beginner, will give others new beginnings.”

Amen.

## **PICK ME! PICK ME!**

*Sermon on the Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost / October 1985*

*First United Lutheran Church, San Francisco*

*Texts: Isaiah 53:7-12; Mark 10:35-45.*

*(The sermon begins by inviting some children in the congregation to come forward to talk about what it is like to pick teams for games or sporting events at school.)*

“Mark... Christopher... Justin... would you come up here and help me talk about something for a minute? *(The boys come forward and they explore together, “When do you get picked? Who usually gets picked first, and how does that feel?” “Who often gets picked last, and how does that feel? When do you like to get picked, and why? Did you hear the gospel story today? Does this sound like what James and John were doing?)*

*To everyone:* I think most of us have been in situations similar to this. Even though we may not think so at first, we are all a bit like James and John. For that is what they wanted too, right? They wanted to play on the team, so they went up to Captain Jesus and started yelling, “Pick me!” “Pick me!” And they would settle for nothing less than being first round draft picks.

Now, of course, you and I in our “maturity” are much more coy about the whole thing than that. You are not going to catch me jumping up and down, yelling “Pick me!” “Pick me!” when the solos are being passed around in choir. No way. But you know full well, or at least I know full well, who wants the solo, and who over all those other pitiful singers deserves it most!

We all want to be somebody; and in our world, somebodies get picked first. They get the best seats, the largest offices, and have the power, fame, and position. So when I in my coy and discreet, yet screaming way, sit in choir yelling “Pick me!” I’m not talking about ‘pick me’ for setting up chairs for rehearsal or to be accompanist. There is no glory there. I’m saying, ‘pick me’ to be the soloist (or maybe director). ‘Pick me’ to be the one who gets the applause and attention, the one who bows to the adoring crowd while the accompanist and other choir peons look on in awe and wonder. (Let me just say here that I am very glad this is not a choir Sunday.)



You fill in the blank yourself: “Pick me to \_\_\_\_\_ (play ball, sing, handle the account, be the one you love).” But however we do it, we all, like James and John, want to be somebodies. And so it is to us that Jesus says, if you want to be somebody, be a servant – with me, he says, and among you, as people on the way (for that is where we are, right?, as John reminded us last week, on the way with Jesus to Jerusalem). As people on that way we are somebodies when we serve.

So, then, what does this call to servant-hood mean to us ‘pick me’ people? What keeps us from being on the way with Jesus?

There are, I think, two very different detours or roadblocks that keep us off the way of service. One wrong route is to follow James and John and yell, “Pick me for the good seats, Teacher.” This is the sin of pride, the sin of building oneself up, of inflating self, of trying to be and play God. And for those of us who excel at this sin, and I am one of them, power and position are our ways of being somebody. We want fame, honor and attention; they define who we are, and sometimes we don’t wait around to be picked. We are out there pushing and shoving for what we want and need. And to us proud ‘pick *ME*’ people, Jesus says, “You are asking for the wrong things; you are playing the wrong game. My way is not position and prestige. My way is service, humility, suffering.”

In this light, then, the passage from Isaiah gives us ‘pick me’ people a new vision of how to be somebody. Being somebody with Jesus may mean being a silent sheep, not top dog. It may mean selling all that you have and giving your money to the poor. It does mean finding your worth, your someone-ness, in being a Child of God on the way with Jesus, and not in being first round draft pick. It means forgiving the most painful and bitter hurts over and over. It means giving fully and totally of yourself for others.

But, true as all that is, and it is true, it is only half of the story. A sermon that ends urging everyone to be silent sheep is incomplete. For Jesus did not say, “If you want to be somebody, be quiet.” He said, “If you want to be somebody, keep saying ‘Pick me,’ but say ‘Pick me to serve.’”

The other roadblock, then, that I see to the way of service, is the sin of silence, of being and remaining a nobody. The error of those who take this route is not that they seek to lord it over others, but that they let themselves be lorded over. They allow themselves to be invisible nobodies, when God is calling them to be serving somebodies. And if you thought I was good at the ‘pick me’ game, you should see me play this one. “Joel, you should move around more when you preach; loosen up!” And I say, “What do you mean move around more? You mean express myself and let people really *see* who I am? You mean come down from the pulpit or out from behind the lectern – give up this security? No way. I’m staying here, safe and under control.”

David Maitland, the chaplain at my college, once said that the gospels are books for the young. When I read about James and John this morning, I tend to agree and feel very old and tired in comparison. James and John were wrong, but they were at least eager to play the game. And that is just what we sinners of this second type are not. We are hiding. Oh, we pass it off as maturity or coyness, but coy is just a mature word for fear. We say, “Oh, I really didn’t want that solo anyway,” but what we mean is, “I wanted it with all my heart, but was too afraid to ask; afraid I would be turned down or laughed at.” We don’t want to risk anything. We like our safety, security and silence.

It is very interesting, I think, to take Chaplain Maitland’s statement and expound a bit upon it, take it one step further. If the sin of *young* James and John is the *youthful* gospel, is a proud ‘pick ME’-ness, then I think the same sin is the province of straights, whites and men, in general, as well. Just look at who has been lording it over others for the past few centuries. Who are the top dogs in our society and the world? And, by the same token, who are the silent sheep? And who has been lorded over? The elderly, people of color, lesbians and gays, women? And while James and John and the young, straights, the whites and the males are out there playing the game, playing it wrong, of course, but playing, the elderly sit in rest homes, people of color in ghettos, gays and lesbians in closets, and women in the kitchen.

Now, hear what I am saying – it is not sinful to be in the rest home or kitchen, but it is evil and sinful if you fearfully hide in those places, especially in the name of service or humility, or if others fearfully hide you away there, again in the name of service or humility. Ghettos and closets serve the needs of proud, false, somebodies. They do not serve God. The great act of service to which God calls women, blacks, Asian-Americans, gays, and the elderly is to refuse to be nobodies any longer and in being somebody, to be a servant.

I don't know what being a servant will mean in your life, but I do know that Jesus is on the way of service and calls you to join. And I don't know what sin it is you tend to, whether you play the wrong game or are too scared to play at all. God's way is somewhere in between and I guess that I am just saying what Luther once said, that not every word of God is a word of God *to me*. You know your tendencies. And whatever you do, don't hide behind these categorizations of certain sins for certain groups of people. It was sort of helpful for me, but if it's not for you, then toss it.

Most of us are such good sinners that we can play both games, take both wrong routes at the same time. We can turn our silence into the loudest, "Pick *ME!*" imaginable. For all the truth in the groupings – and there is, I think, quite a bit – sin knows no special boundaries. You don't have to be lesbian to hide in a closet, and you don't have to be male to seek dominance. You don't have to be black to live in a ghetto, nor do you have to be young to consider yourself just short of deity. But you can be any color or any age, any orientation or any sex and say to God, "Pick me! Pick me to be your servant." And then, as you walk on the way of Jesus, you will be somebody.

Amen.

`P.S. No one said it would be easy. Thanks, Mark, Christopher and Justin. I'll pick you for my team any time!