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Easter 7 – May 28, 2022

“When what you’ve signed up for ...”

Read: Acts 16: 6 - 10/ Memorize: Acts 16: 10

I want to ask you a question: How do you respond when God, or life itself, changes your plans? We’ve all had this kind of experience. We may attribute it to God or life but suddenly and unexpectedly, change happens. It may just be for the day, it may be for your life.

I love the “Peanuts” cartoons. Here’s one. In the first panel Charlie Brown says, “I learned something in school today. I signed up for folk guitar, computer programming, stained glass art, shoemaking and the natural foods workshop.”

In the next panel he says, “Instead, I got spelling, history, arithmetic and two study periods.” Next Charlie’s friend asks, “So, what did you learn?” Charlie says, “I learned that what you sign up for and what you get are two different things in life.”

Welcome to life. So the question is not if you will have to deal with change. It’s how you’ll respond. In large part, that will depend on your trust in God and your commitment to place your life in God’s hands.

Pastor David Watson writes about a busy time when he was serving as a pastor in Springfield, MO. As he was driving from one meeting to the next, he felt a strong urge to stop by the local hospital to pray for someone. He didn’t know for whom he was to pray. He just knew that someone in the hospital needed him to come pray.

As in most instances in our lives, God could not have picked a less convenient time to lay this burden on his heart. Why would God interrupt his day with such a vague calling? Despite his misgivings, Watson felt God’s tug strongly. He drove to the hospital. A man, sitting nearby in the lobby heard Watson’s voice and approached him. He was the janitor. That morning, he had cleaned the room of a woman with a terminal illness.

As she watched Pastor Watson on TV, she prayed aloud, “God, if you really exist and really are a God who cares about me, send that pastor to my room today to pray for me.” It may seem crazy, but that was her prayer.

The janitor who heard this prayer decided he would stick around to take him to the dying woman. Now, he escorted the TV pastor to the dying women’s room. Imagine her joy when Pastor Watson walked in. She was now reassured that God cared for her.

Perhaps you’ve experienced a door closing in your life and wondered why. “Why” is the question we often ask when things like that happen. Was it possible that God was leading you as He did Paul and his companions? Perhaps, you want consider a different question: “Lord, what are you trying to teach me through this?”

In Acts 16 Paul, Silas and Timothy wanted to head in one direction, but were prevented. Because that door closed, they landed up exactly where God wanted them to be for the next part of their journey.

We generally do o.k. with small changes in life. What if God changes your plans for the rest of your life? If you’ve ever questioned God’s will, if you’ve ever thought that your life just took an unexpected detour, then you can appreciate how Paul, Silas and Timothy might have felt. What Paul knew, and we want to remember, is that we’re to follow God’s way, not our own.

The Bible tells us God’s ways are higher than our ways. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. If you are waiting around for God to answer the question why, you may end up bitter and find yourself withdrawn from God. When you change the question to “What are you trying to teach me through this, Lord?” you are opening yourself up to God and His working in you and through you.

Roger Visker had his dream job of being a police officer. It was all he ever wanted to be. He loved the job and advanced in rank quickly in the 14 years he served. Everyone thought he would never give it up.

Roger was also a devout Christian. One day, when he was studying his Bible, Roger heard God tell him, “Roger, I want you to leave police work and go into the

ministry.” If only God was always that direct. What would you do if God told you to give up the life you love? How would you respond?

It probably won't surprise you that Roger struggled to understand and to obey God's leading. He spent time in prayer. He made the decision to turn his life over to God. He asked God that if this was truly what He wanted Him to do, He would take away his love of police work.

In the next few months, he met with friends, a counselor, a college registrar as well as his extended family. They all provided guidance, but more importantly they provided support for Roger's new sense of calling. Roger and his wife had to move so he could attend the seminary.

He spent 22 years in ministry. He testifies that God replaced his love of police work with a deep love for ministry. He found great joy in that new work. He trusted God's plans. God gave him a new purpose and a new way to impact lives that will live on after him.

So now how does all that relate to us? Do you expect God to do something important with your life? Do you believe God has a purpose for you? Dr. Albert Day wrote a book called *Letters On The Healing Ministry*. In his book Dr. Day says that most Christians suffer not from an abundance of expectation about what God would lead them to do but from a poverty of expectation. Think about that phrase for a moment: “a poverty of expectation.” They don't expect God to do anything important in and through their lives.

They often think that God uses other people, people who are smarter, holier, more talented to do His work than they are. I've heard this phrase often: “God can't possibly use me.” Perhaps this quote from Dr. Day will strike you as it did me, “Our chronic weakness is not that we expect too much from God, but we trust Him for too little.”

Paul and his companions did not suffer from a poverty of expectation. Everywhere they went they expected God to use them. God never let them down. So when Paul dreamt of a man from Macedonia begging him for help, he and his companions headed straight in that direction. They landed up in the city of Philippi.

Sometimes we get in God's way. We erect barriers based on some preconceived notions of who we should minister to or work with. I wonder how Paul felt when he met a group of women rather than men. Because of the status of women that could have been a barrier. Yet, God led him to a woman named Lydia who was a Gentile. Lydia was so moved by Paul's message that she committed her life and her whole household to God.

Inn 2 Corinthians 5: 19 – 20 Paul writes, "God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation..." He goes on to explain it in this way, "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God was making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God."

You see, God can't do much with a life that isn't committed to Him. He can't do much with believers who don't see every moment of their lives as an opportunity to do the work of Jesus in all circumstances. I came across this interesting quote, "Those who put everything in God's hands, eventually see God's hand in everything."

That's exactly what Paul did. He put everything in God's hands and saw God's hand in everything. A pastor came to a church in Pittsburgh. When God first called him, he thought it was a mistake. He didn't really think he could fit in. The community around his church had great poverty and many needs. Although he did not feel he was the right person, he resolved that he would give his very best to this challenging situation.

The church began an afterschool program for children to keep them off the streets. They began ministries to men in prison and battling addictions. The pastor even invited some of those men to live with him temporarily in order to give them a fresh start.

When he was interviewed by a magazine, he confessed that, "In the beginning, there were so many times I wanted to quit. I would pray, 'Lord, you made a mistake.'" Although Pastor Cochrane felt it was a mistake, he remained and waited for some kind of answer from God.

One day that answer walked through his office door. It was a little boy named Ike, and he was ten years old. Ike came up and asked, "How long are you gonna be here?" The pastor was honest and said he really didn't know. Then, Ike wrapped

his arms around his neck and said, “Don’t go anywhere. If you’re here I’m going to make it.” In that moment, he knew that God’s answer to his prayer was both no and yes. No, God didn’t make a mistake and yes, he could do it.

If you want to see the great work of God, just look around you at ordinary people who are doing extraordinary things. We so often don’t think we’re doing any big deal. Do you expect God to act through you? If you do, just keep your eyes open because He’s got lots of work for you. God will place His greatest opportunities right in front of you. They’ll come in the most ordinary of circumstances. When you believe that God is using you, you will live in constant hope, expectation and joy.

Here’s your question: How will you respond to God’s call to serve?