

We've just celebrated our first 10 years as a Church, and that's prompted us to dream about where God wants to take us next. We believe the next step is that [1 VISION slide] **Catalyst creates spaces where everyone can embrace their God-given calling.** For the last three weeks, we've been exploring that vision through the lens of our core values - Love, Serve and Grow.

[2 LOVE / Everyone] First, Sue Sweeney invited us to love more boldly.

[3 SERVE / out of love] Last week, Tim Basselin pushed Sue's words about love even further by challenging us to imagine serving not out of duty, but out of love. He told us we don't *have to* serve, but in Jesus, we are *free* to follow our loves, to serve out of love. Tim ended with a question I want to explore today with you:

How do we know what we love?

I know that's not the question you expected for today... we've done Love and Serve, so today is supposed to be about Grow. We're supposed to be talking about how we grow in our faith at Catalyst, about what growing will look like in the next 10 years.

And when we think about growing in faith, I bet if you're anything like me, it goes something like this: "I would love to grow in my faith, but I don't have the TIME for that. If we're being honest, I'm doing pretty well just to get through my day. Between work and home, I have a lot going on, and sometimes (a lot of times), spiritual stuff sort of slips through the cracks.

[4 Two Gardens] It's like we have two gardens - a secular garden and a spiritual garden. They represent the different areas of our life. So in the secular garden we have our jobs, our families, our leisure time, our education, our spouses, partners, friends, kids, parents, siblings, hobbies, dreams, goals. And in the other garden we have our souls.

We have a limited amount of time and energy, so when we think about growing spiritually, it's always taking time away from our secular garden to tend to our spirituality. We go to church, read our bibles, pray, serve, give, and so on.

But anything we invest in this garden is stealing from that garden. So the sacred and secular are at war within us. And we mostly choose to focus on the secular garden and feel guilty about neglecting the spiritual stuff. We figure our jobs need doing and kids need fed and God can probably take care of himself. And if we're being really honest, while we like Church, our hearts are really over here in the secular stuff. Maybe we really love what we do for a living, or we're just crazy about our kids or we have a hobby that we can't wait to get to on the weekends.

It's not just the big stuff where this tension plays out - it can be in our daily decisions as well. I was raised in the Church, so I felt this tension my whole life. All I was ever told to do at Church was read my Bible and pray - nevermind I couldn't understand 3/4 of my Bible... just *read it!*

[5 **Stack of books**] The *reading* wasn't a problem for me - I was and continue to be a huge nerd, so I love to read. The problem was the Bible part. I have a cousin who got me into reading fantasy - J. R. R. Tolkien and Terry Brooks and Stephen R. Donaldson. I found a deep love for these 500+ page books that could transport me into another world. I devoured them. I'd read them and then read them again and then read them again.

And I'd usually feel at least a little guilty when I'd read a couple hundred pages of fantasy in a week but only a chapter or two of the Bible. Because I was investing a lot more time in the secular stuff than in the spiritual stuff.

Anyone know that tension? Between sacred and secular, between God and the rest of your life? It's no wonder when we think about "growing Spiritually", most of us have sort of given up because it's too hard. We simply don't have the time it would take to invest in a healthy, whole spiritual life, so we settle for... more or less whatever we have now.

[4 **Two Gardens**] For all of us who love something in the secular garden, those of us who feel guilty because God's over here and our heart is captivated here, I've got some good news for you:

[6 **One Garden**] This idea we have that there are sacred things and secular things is wrong. 100% wrong. Reality is not divided into sacred places God is and secular places God is not. You have one life, one garden to stick to the analogy, and you can find God anywhere you choose to look. In fact, God is calling you not out of your "secular" world, but right in the midst of your everyday life.

Growing spiritually doesn't mean abandoning where you are and setting out to find God in some sacred sanctuary. Growing spiritually means learning to listen to God's call right where you are.

If we're going to embrace this good news, if we're going to learn to find God where we are, we have to stop dividing our world into sacred and secular. We must embrace the whole world the way God does.

Some of us have a hard time believing God loves the whole world, that God embraces the world because that's not what we've been taught. We've heard God hates the world, God will judge the world, God is going to take us all away from the world.

[**Scripture Slide**] But that's not the vision of the world we see in the Scriptures. If you have a bible, turn with me to Colossians 1. As you're turning there, we're about to read part of a song the first Christians used in worship. This song celebrates a God who loves the world. The imagery of the song reaches back to the beginning of the Scriptures, to a God who created the world and continues every day to sustain the world.

Hear the words of the song, beginning in verse 15:

Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see— such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him. He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together. -- Colossians 1:15-17

God created everything and in God, everything holds together. This is an important observation: Even many who think of God as the creator, see God as distant and cold, uninvolved in the day-to-day operations of our little blue ball.

But according to Scripture, God not only creates but sustains. [7 Garden with "God" raining drops] Reality continues forward at God's constant, continual invitation and will. This is why in the Psalm we read together, the Psalmist marvels at God's presence:

I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave, you are there. If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me. I could ask the darkness to hide me and the light around me to become night— but even in darkness I cannot hide from you. To you the night shines as bright as day. Darkness and light are the same to you. -- Psalm 139:7-12

God is involved intimately with creation. There is no part of the world where God is not, no moment not God-breathed, no creature or person unloved.

The Psalmist celebrates God's expansive, loving, searching presence. The song in Colossians points out that all this creation and sustaining occurs by the will of God through Jesus himself. The song begins with, "Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth." For Colossians, Jesus is the Word of God, the very creative act through which God brings about all things.

[8 Trinity symbol with Father Son Spirit] We should pause a moment here because today is Trinity Sunday in the life of the Church. Christians all over the world are celebrating God's mysterious three-in-oneness. It's easy to get a headache trying to wrap your brain around how God is three persons in one being. But the bottom line good news about the Trinity is that God is love. And when we say God is love, what we mean is that God is a giver. God is most basically a being who gives. So it's good that God is three in one because all three persons are always giving to and receiving from the others.

What that means for creation is that God creates out of love. Because God loves to give, God created a world to which God could give good gifts. And God filled that world with beings that are like God in that way.

The world is fundamentally relational. And human beings are most basically relational. The core of existence is mutual, self-giving love. We were created to give love and to receive love. You were created to love and to be loved.

God created us to live in that relational world. And God calls us to live relationally. And God lives relationally *with us*. Again, this is the message of the psalm:

O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I'm far away. You see me when I travel and when I rest at home. You know everything I do. You know what I am going to say even before I say it, Lord. You go before me and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to understand! Psalm 139: 1-6

God knows us fully and loves us unconditionally. The same God who spoke the universe into being, who spins the galaxies on their axes, whose breath sparked the stars to burn, breathes life into you and me, and calls us to join in this life-giving love that is the very essence of the Trinity.

Love is the essence of creation. God is near, God is with us. And that means God's calling on our lives is closer than we imagine. God is in the midst of everything we already love - right in the middle of that garden we think is "secular".

When we picture God as a cold, distant, detached deity, is it any wonder we imagine our calling is similarly difficult to discern? God is OVER THERE. Calling is hidden, secret, difficult, probably something we didn't want to do anyway. Discerning a calling is a difficult task, one few are up for. Leave it to the spiritual giants, those who are especially attuned to the things of God, or who are lucky or... something. And growing means leaving our loves to do our duties.

But God is near. God is with us. And that means calling is not a buried treasure or a hidden, unobtainable goal. Rather, our callings are hiding in plain sight. The church father St. Augustine of Hippo, in his classic work *Confessions*, writes of how embracing Love in the person of Jesus unlocked his calling for him. Augustine came to faith as an adult, and had spent a good bit of his younger days availing himself of every pleasure he craved. Reflecting back on his journey to faith, Augustine writes this:

[9 Augustine Quote] I sought a way to gain the strength which I needed to enjoy you. But I did not find it until I embraced the mediator between God and humanity, the person Christ Jesus, who is above all, God blessed forever. He was calling me and saying: "I am the way of truth, I am the life. He was offering food which I lacked the strength to take, the food he had mingled with our flesh. For the Word became flesh, that your wisdom, by which you created all things, might provide milk for us children.

Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! You were within me, but I was outside, and it was there that I searched for you. In my unloveliness, I plunged

into the lovely things which you created. You were with me, but I was not with you. Created things kept me from you; yet if they had not been in you they would not have been at all. You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness. You breathed your fragrance on me; I drew in breath and now I pant for you. I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me, and I burned for your peace. -- St. Augustine of Hippo

A relationship with God reoriented every desire Augustine had. In the wake of embracing God, Augustine found all his loves transformed. He found the things he had previously sought for pleasure now pointed him to God. That God had in fact been calling him through those desires to the deep love at the heart of reality.

Augustine found that our desire for creation is from God, that our desires ultimately lead us back to God.

This is because God loves us. As the Psalmist observes: **How precious are your thoughts about me, O God. They cannot be numbered! I can't even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand! And when I wake up, you are still with me! -- 17-18**

Because God loves us, because God is near to us, when we embrace God, we learn to love well. And this love that is the core of our reality, the core of our humanity, is the key to our calling. This is why discovering calling is not as difficult as we think.

We assume learning to hear God's call is difficult because we believe that God is hidden, that God is distant. But according to Scripture, God *wants* us to know him. God has given us life so that we might search for God and find life. If love is the heartbeat of God, and if we are created in God's image, then **our loves are the path to God's calling on our lives.**

When we discover what we love, we are ready to follow God's call on our lives.

Of course that raises the question of how all that works. After all, we all have desires that *aren't* good. It doesn't take a genius to see how a desire for food or security or approval or love can lead to dangerous places.

Christians have long used a process of discernment to determine which of our desires lead to life and which lead to death. It begins with our relationship with God, by asking God to teach us how to see our desires well. As the Psalmist says,

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life. -- Psalm 139:23-24

We ask God to teach us how to love. We meet with others who are seeking as well - people beside us in the journey and people who are further along, who can guide us with the experiences they've gleaned. And then... we do what seems right to do.

Do what seems right. That sounds a lot like what we hear our culture tell us - do what feels good. You deserve this. But remember Augustine - he did what felt good for *a lot* of his life. And he realized that what felt good wasn't always what was right. It wasn't until he found himself in relationship with God that he could begin to see the *right*.

Do what feels good doesn't go far enough because what feels good in the moment isn't always what promotes flourishing. We all know that. But we've convinced ourselves that we *can't* know what is right, that our desires are untrustworthy, that God is *there* and we are *here* and that means doing what's right is a difficult thing.

But God is not distant. God is near. God is with us. God is making us new. And that means we can do what seems right. We can trust our renewed, restored instincts. This is the spiritual practice of discerning our loves, of learning how to align our hearts with the loving God at the core of reality.

What does it mean to GROW at Catalyst as we look to the future? It means we discern our loves, and then we *act*. Growing doesn't come from learning more information. Growing happens when we *act* on God's call. In the long (but hopefully not too long) term, we are working to develop a mentoring process whereby less-experienced believers can walk alongside someone further in their journey, to help us discern how our loves orient us toward our callings.

[Let's [do our own version of this](#)] [10 Slide with card on it] In the meantime, however, you can adopt a practice of prayer first implemented by Ignatius of Loyola - it's a variation on the Prayer of Examen we often do at the close of our gatherings. The card you found when you came in is a simple guide to this prayer, designed for the end of every day. This examen invites you to review your day with gratitude, to reflect on where you saw God working and how you can participate in God's life the next day.

Friends, God is much closer to us than we realize, and God wants to be found. God wants us to seek, and makes our callings discernible, not difficult.

To grow in your faith, to grow into the person God is calling you to become doesn't require you to abandon your life, the things and people you love, to step out of the garden of the secular into the garden of the sacred. Our growth begins by realizing *everything* is sacred. Everything is a good gift to us from a God who is nearer to us than we dared imagine, a God hiding in plain sight that we might seek and discover this God who *wants* us to find our calling. You want to grow? Act. Do the next thing that seems right. Answer God's call on your life.

What if this week, you took 15 minutes every day to prayerfully consider your calling? (Use that Examen card.) What if you took 15 minutes to consider what you want with all your heart? What if you committed to doing something about it every day this week - something big or something small. How might you begin to find life where you least expected it?

Can you imagine if everyone at Catalyst was living out of our loves? If we were all connected in the core of our beings to the very things God is calling us to do that bring about God's kingdom here on Earth as it is in heaven? What if we were all doing exactly what we deeply longed to do, in such a way that we are agents of healing and hope in the world?

Friends this is not a pipe dream. This is who Catalyst will become as we all embrace our callings. Growing is not a chore, not an obligation. To discover our callings and answer them is our very lifeblood. Let's do this together.

[Prayer]

Benediction

[11 Quote] "Nothing is more practical than finding God, than falling in Love in a quite absolute, final way.

What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything.

It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, whom you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude.

Fall in Love, stay in love, and it will decide everything." -- Pedro Arrupe, SJ (1907-1991)