

## Luke 4: 21-30

IN THE MOTION PICTURE *CHARIOTS OF FIRE*, THERE IS AN UNFORGETTABLE SCENE AND LINE ABOUT DECIDING TO DO WHAT ONE HAS TO DO; WHAT ONE IS CALLED TO DO. THE STORY IS ABOUT THE 1924 OLYMIC GAMES AND SCOTTISH RUNNER, A WORLD-CLASS SPRINTER, BY THE NAME OF ERIC LIDDELL. LIDDELL IS THE SON OF A MINISTER. HE'S A THEOLOGICAL STUDENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH, PREPARING TO BE A MISSIONARY. BUT HE CAN RUN, AND TO COMPETE IN THE OLYMPICS, HE MUST DISCONTINUE HIS THEOLOGICAL STUDIES IN ORDER TO TRAIN PROPERLY. ONE SCENE IN THE MOVIE SHOWS LIDDELL AND HIS SISTER TALKING ABOUT HIS DECISION. SHE IS ARGUING THAT HE OUGHT TO FORGET ABOUT RUNNING AND LISTEN TO GOD'S CALL TO THE MISSION FIELD. AND LIDDELL SAYS "I BELIEVE GOD MADE ME FOR A PURPOSE; BUT HE ALSO MADE ME FAST. AND WHEN I RUN I FEEL PLEASURE. TO GIVE IT UP WOULD BE TO HOLD HIM IN CONTEMPT; TO WIN IS TO HONOR HIM."

AND SO LIDDELL DECIDES TO RUN---TO FEEL THE PLEASURE OF GOD, TO HONOR GOD BY RUNNING. THE REASON THE MOVIE WAS MADE WAS LIDDELL'S DECISION TO DROP OUT OF THE 100-METER DASH BECAUSE THE EVENT WAS SCHEDULED FOR SUNDAY, AND HIS RELIGIOUS CONVICTION THAT NO ACTIVITY TAKE PLACE ON THE SABBATH REQUIRED HIM NOT TO PARTICIPATE. COACHES, POLITICIANS, TEAMMATES, EVEN BRITISH ROYALTY, TRIED TO PERSUADE HIM TO RUN, BUT HE WOULD NOT BUDGE. FINALLY, A TEAMMATE, HAROLD ABRAHAMS, WHO WAS JEWISH AND THE BRITISH 400 METER CHAMPION, SUGGESTED THAT HE AND LIDDELL SWAP EVENTS. LIDDELL AGREED AND ENTERED THE 400, A VERY DIFFERENT AND OBVIOUSLY LONGER EVENT. ABRAHAMS ENTERED THE 100. REMARKABLY, BOTH WON GOLD MEDALS.

IT'S A GREAT STORY WITH THE BEST LINE BEING, "I BELIEVE GOD MADE ME FOR A PURPOSE: BUT HE ALSO MADE ME FAST. AND WHEN I RUN I FEEL PLEASURE. TO GIVE IT UP WOULD BE TO HOLD HIM IN CONTEMPT; TO WIN IS TO HONOR HIM."

IT IS, OF COURSE, THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION OF ALL: WHAT SHOULD I DO WITH MY LIFE? WHAT IS MY PURPOSE? WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO BE DOING? IS WHAT I'M DOING THE RIGHT THING? DOES IT MATTER? WHAT DOES GOD WANT ME TO DO? DOES GOD HAVE AGENDA FOR ME, A PLAN, A PROGRAM?

AS CHRISTIANS WE BELIEVE THAT GOD DOES INDEED HAVE SOMETHING IN MIND FOR US, EACH OF US, INDIVIDUALLY. "TO EACH IS GIVEN THE MANIFESTATION OF THE SPIRIT FOR THE COMMON GOOD," PAUL WROTE.

THE YEAR IS 627 B.C. THE LAST STRONG LEADER OF THE ASSYRIAN EMPIRE HAS DIED, AND THERE ARE MAJOR CHANGES ON THE HORIZON FOR ISRAEL. AND AT THAT MOMENT A

**YOUNG BOY HEARS A VOICE: “BEFORE I FORMED YOU I KNEW YOU, BEFORE YOU WERE BORN I CONSECRATED YOU TO BE A PROPHET TO THE NATIONS.”**

**IT HAPPENS SEVERAL TIMES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT. AND SO DOES WHAT HAPPENS NEXT: “AH, LORD GOD! TRULY, I DO NOT KNOW HOW TO SPEAK, FOR I AM ONLY A BOY.”**

**THE PATTERN IS CONSISTENT. GOD CALLS. THE CANDIDATE DECLINES. MOSES IS TENDING HIS FATHER-IN-LAW’S FLOCK IN THE WILDERNESS. A BUSH GOES UP IN FLAMES AND A VOICE TELLS HIM HIS JOB IS TO GO TO EGYPT AND LIBERATE THE PEOPLE. AND MOSES SAYS IN EFFECT, “WHO ME? THANKS, BUT NO THANKS.” GOD CALLS JONAH TO GO TO NINEVEH AND JONAH HEADS OUT IN THE OTHER DIRECTION. GOD CALLS JEREMIAH AND JEREMIAH STAMMERS, “I DON’T KNOW HOW TO TALK. I’M NOT UP TO THIS. I’M ONLY A BOY.”**

**GOD CALLS. CANDIDATE DECLINES. GOD WON’T TAKE NO FOR AN ANSWER. GOD IS PERSISTENT.**

**GOD KEEPS AFTER MOSES, TRACKS JONAH DOWN ALL THE WAY TO THE BELLY OF THE WHALE, SAYS BACK TO RELUCTANT JEREMIAH, “DO NOT SAY, ‘I AM ONLY A BOY;’ FOR YOU SHALL GO TO ALL TO WHOM I SEND YOU AND YOU SHALL SPEAK WHATEVER I COMMAND YOU.”**

**CALLS FROM GOD ARE SCARY. TELL SOMEONE GOD SPOKE TO YOU, AND YOU MIGHT GET QUESTIONABLE LOOKS. THE VOICE OF GOD? TO ME? TO YOU? A REAL VOICE? WHAT DOES GOD SOUND LIKE? CHARLTON HESTON? MAYBE YOUR CALL IS NOT EXACTLY A VOICE. IT COULD BE A THOUGHT YOU CANNOT SHAKE—AN IDEA THAT SEEMS CRAZY OR IRRATIONAL. YOU TRY TO IGNORE IT, BUT IT SEEMS TO BE THERE AGAIN AND AGAIN. PERHAPS GOD’S VOICE WASN’T QUITE THAT DISTINCT AND CLEAR FOR MOSES, JONAH OR JEREMIAH EITHER. AS I LOOK BACK AT PIVOTAL EVENTS AND IMPORTANT DECISIONS IN MY OWN LIFE, THINGS LOOK A LOT CLEARER IN RETROSPECT THAN THEY DO AT THE TIME. AT THE TIME, IT’S PRETTY CONFUSING, DISTURBING: YOU LIE AWAKE AT NIGHT WRESTLING WITH OPTIONS, YOU TAKE LONG WALKS TO SORT IT OUT: “SHALL I DO THIS OR THAT? WHAT IF I GO THAT WAY? WHAT IF I STAY PUT?”**

**BUT THE URGING, THE THOUGHT, THE FEELING, THE IDEA DOESN’T GO AWAY.**

**IT REMINDS ME OF THE OWL THAT BRINGS HARRY POTTER INVITATIONS TO ATTEND HOGWARTS. HARRY’S LESS-THAN-KIND AUNT AND UNCLE TRY, AS BEST THEY CAN, TO DESTROY THE INVITATIONS. THEY EVEN TRY ESCAPING TO A REMOTE CABIN ON AN ISLAND. FINALLY THE UMPTIETH LETTER ARRIVES PERSONALLY DELIVERED BY AN ANGRY GIANT OF A MAN NAMED HAGRID.**

**GOD’S CALL WAS LIKE THAT FOR JEREMIAH...IT WAS RELENTLESS AND INEVITABLE.**

THE PROPHET JEREMIAH SPEAKS TO SOMETHING MANY OF US KNOW; WE DO NOT CHOOSE GOD; GOD SOMEHOW MYSTERIOUSLY AND EVEN OFTEN AGAINST OUR WILL CHOOSES US. JEREMIAH SAYS THAT HE HEARD THE WORD OF THE LORD. THE LORD HAPPENED TO HIM. THIS WAS AN EVENT. NOT ONLY HAD GOD FOLLOWED HIM LIKE A SPIRITUAL DETECTIVE FROM THE BEGINNING, BUT WITH GOD'S AWESOME COMMAND OF LOGIC, THERE IS A RESPONSE TO EVERY OBJECTION. JEREMIAH WAS NOT GOING TO SLIP OUT INTO THE NIGHT UNDETECTED AND GO ON HIS MERRY WAY. IT WAS AN EVENT AND GOD HAD HIM. MAYBE THAT IS WHAT GOD HAS IN MIND FOR EACH PERSON---SOME MOMENT, SOME AWARENESS, WHEN WE SAY YES TO GOD.

JEREMIAH WAS SO DESPERATE TO WIGGLE OUT OF THIS CALL THAT HE TRIED THE STRATEGY FIRST ATTEMPTED BY MOSES, WHO SAID HE COULD NOT SPEAK. MAKING EXCUSES REALLY IS NOT NEW. IT GOES ALL THE WAY BACK TO ADAM AND EVE AND CONTINUES TODAY. MANY OF OUR EXCUSES ARE SELF-SERVING AREN'T THEY? IT SEEMS EASIER TO STAND ON THE SIDELINES, TO NOT GET INVOLVED OR HAVE OUR ROUTINES INTERRUPTED. IT'S SO MUCH SAFER TO NOT PUT OURSELVES OUT IN THE OPEN, EXPOSING OURSELVES AS THE VULNERABLE PEOPLE WE REALLY ARE. AT TIMES, WE GO AS FAR AS TO GIVE UP THE GREATEST JOYS, BEING INVOLVED IN THE MOST EXCITING ENDEAVORS, ALL FOR THE SAKE OF OUR COMFORTABLE, SAFE, BORING ROUTINES.

EACH ONE OF US WHO IS A FOLLOWER OF JESUS HAS BEEN KNOWN BY GOD, CLAIMED BY GOD AND CALLED BY GOD, ONE AT A TIME. WE HAVE BEEN CALLED TO DEMONSTRATE COMPASSION, TO LIVE ABUNDANTLY AND ENHANCE LIFE WHERE EVER WE ARE. WHAT WE DO WELL TO REMEMBER IS THAT THERE ARE MANY MORE BLESSINGS THAN LIABILITIES AND RISKS.

OR AS ERIC LIDDELL PUT IT, "I BELIEVE GOD MADE ME FOR A PURPOSE; BUT HE ALSO MADE ME FAST. AND WHEN I RUN I FEEL HIS PLEASURE. TO GIVE IT UP WOULD BE TO HOLD HIM IN CONTEMPT; TO WIN IS TO HONOR HIM."

AFTER THE OLYMPICS, ERIC LIDDELL RETURNED TO SCHOOL, BECAME A MISSIONARY IN CHINA, AND DIED IN A JAPANESE PRISON CAMP JUST A FEW WEEKS BEFORE THE CAMP WAS LIBERATED BY AMERICAN TROOPS IN 1945.

GOD HAS SOMETHING IN MIND FOR YOU, WORK TO DO, COMMUNITY TO CREATE, PEOPLE TO LOVE, LIVES TO SAVE, THE KINGDOM OF GOD TO BUILD. THE PROMISE IS ONCE YOU KNOW WHAT IT IS, THERE IS NOTHING TO FEAR. IT WAS MOTHER TERESA WHO SAID: "I WAS NOT CALLED TO BE SUCCESSFUL, BUT FAITHFUL. EACH ONE OF US HAS SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL TO DO FOR GOD." GOD SENDS EVERY PERSON INTO THE WORLD WITH A SPECIAL MESSAGE TO DELIVER, WITH A SPECIAL SONG TO SING FOR OTHERS, WITH A SPECIAL ACT OF LOVE TO BESTOW. NO ONE ELSE CAN SPEAK YOUR MESSAGE OR SING YOUR SONG OR OFFER

**YOUR ACT OF LOVE. WHAT DO YOU REALLY CARE ABOUT? HOW CAN YOU FOLLOW YOUR HEART MORE FAITHFULLY? WHAT ARE YOUR GIFTS AND WHERE CAN THEY ENJOY FULLER EXPRESSION IN THE CAUSE OF GOD'S KINGDOM?**

**BEFORE GOD FORMED YOU IN THE WOMB GOD KNEW YOU; BEFORE YOU WERE BORN GOD CONSECRATED YOU; DO NOT SAY, "I AM ONLY.....FOR YOU SHALL GO TO ALL WHOM GOD SENDS YOU; DO NOT BE AFRAID; FOR GOD IS WITH YOU TO DELIVER YOU; MAY YOU FEEL THE HAND OF GOD ON YOUR LIFE; YOUR HEART THIS DAY.**