

What does God require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. — Micah 6:8

Practicing What You Preach

I can see your faces. Over my years at Pullen a number of you I have met with me to discuss a big decision in your life. “What should I do?” you wonder out loud. I can see the tension in your shoulders, the crinkle of your forehead, the uncertainty in your eyes. The torture is not knowing and really needing to know. It’s like the last question on the geometry final in high school. You’ve got to get it right or you will fail the test, which means you will flunk the course, which means you will be taking geometry this summer instead of swimming at the pool with all the popular kids.

And I hear myself saying to you, “What do you want?” This hardly relieves the anxiety-ridden countenance across from me. “What do you mean, what do I want?” you reply. “I want to know what to do in this situation.”

“No, what do you really want down in your soul,” I come back at you. “I know it isn’t easy to answer. You have to sit with that question for a long time. You have to block out all the things you think you are supposed to want or do. But if you will gently but persistently pose this question to yourself, some clarity will emerge.”

Two months ago I turned the tables and started asking myself what I wanted. I had decided the first half of the equation. I no longer wanted to be a pastor. While that clarity had come unexpectedly, I didn’t have to struggle to find it. One day I was a pastor, like I had been most of my adult life, and the next day I knew it was over. Weird but true.

Then the hard part started. What do I want to do next was the obvious question. I had no idea. I really didn’t. Lots of my friends thought I was kidding about that, but I wasn’t. My instinctive response was “I want to get a job and provide for my family.” So, I started looking at open positions in the non-profit world where my experience and skills seemed to fit best. But something wasn’t right. Every position had a flaw in it. I couldn’t see myself in any of them. I lay awake at night paralyzed by the “not knowing” of what direction I needed to pursue.

Then I started seeing your faces and hearing my words of advice.

“Pay attention to early childhood memories; those will tell you something about your natural interests and inclinations.”

“Notice what parts of your life give you energy, the things you do because you want to, not because you have to.”

“Try to imagine yourself doing what you most enjoy without deciding how realistic it is; this is about finding out what is real inside of you, not what is logical or necessary.”

In other words, I entered into the same discernment process that I had suggested to many of you. I didn’t know how long it would take. I feared it might be years before I could find the answers I was seeking, and I didn’t have years. Uncle Sam and my mortgage company don’t really care that I am trying to figure out what to do with my life. They want their checks just the same.

For weeks I tried to stay in this open place, asking myself

these questions and holding at bay the voices screaming inside my head, “Grab a job, dummy! Any job before you plunge into financial ruin!” The voices in my head can be a bit critical and crabby.

Then after six weeks of this psycho-drama being staged inside of me, the answer arrived. Actually, it was answers. As I had looked at my life and work, three things came clear. I love to teach, I love to write, and I love sitting with people one-on-one in a counseling setting. I’m curious about people and love to listen as they talk about real things, even if those things are bitter and hard. I cannot tell you what a relief it was to figure this out. It felt like I had gotten the last question right on the geometry final and I could head for the pool.

So, after I leave Pullen on November 22, I am going to try and build a life that will include pastoral counseling, adjunct teaching, and writing. It scares me to say this out loud because there are no guarantees about any of it. It will take a while to figure out if this is doable, and if it is doable is it something I can make a living doing. I have no idea.

Part of me doesn’t care, though. This process has taught me some things about myself I needed to know, regardless of what my next job is. There are still a lot of things that will keep me up at night; knowing what I want won’t be one of them.

I will miss your faces, your voices, but most of all your good souls. They have blessed me and taught me, even when I didn’t realize I was being blessed and taught. As Dag Hammarskjöld once wrote: “For all that has been, thanks! For all that will be, yes!” Amen.

—Jack



Texas Hoe-Down in honor of Pastor Jack McKinney

Sunday, November 22, 12:00 – 2:00 PM

Celebrate the gifts that Jack has shared with us for 10 years.

Music by Larry King and the Back Porch Boys

Pull your crock pots off the shelves
and prepare your award-winning chili for our
Chili Cook-Off

Complete with prizes for the spiciest, most original,
tastiest vegetarian, and best all around chili.

Pen a tribute or roast for Jack to the tune of
The Yellow Rose of Texas or *Deep in the Heart of Texas*.
David Wilson will accompany you on the piano.

To sign up for the chili cook-off, or to offer help for
this special event, please contact Serena
Buckner at sbbuckner@yahoo.com or 856-1779.

