As I mentioned last week, we are currently in a transition time on our liturgical calendar between the seasons of Epiphany and Lent, which will begin next Wednesday the 18th with Ash Wednesday. During this transitional time, we are invited to pause for a bit to reflect upon our everyday activities and our relationship with Christ. Very often we get so caught up in the busyness of the festive season. We need this time of Sabbath (so to speak) to reflect, refocus, and recommit.

The texts that we read earlier invite us to examine our spiritual calling as followers of Christ. “*How are we honoring our partnership in God’s mission here on earth in our everyday life? Are we bearing fruits and making disciples for the Kingdom of God?”*

In his letter to the early church in Corinth, the Apostle Paul challenged the believers then, as well as us today, that *proclaiming the gospel is not just something that we do, but it should be the core of our belief and the essence of who we are, as followers of Christ.* It should become automatic and natural like breathing and walking.

As part of our calling, we are challenged to **“*become all things to all people*”** for the purpose of “**blending in**”, “**reaching out**”, and connecting with those around us. In one of the contemporary translations[[1]](#footnote-1), it uses the term “**finding a common ground**” instead of “becoming.” I think I like that better as it implies that **not everyone is the same**. It’s OK for us to be different but we must strive to seek a “common ground” where we can connect with one another in a mutual level.

One point, however, we must be clear is that his notion of “*becoming all things to all people*” by no means suggests that the Gospel message is being “watered” down”. We do it because we are obligated to share God’s blessings to us and not keeping them all to ourselves. This is part of God’s vision as we embrace with one another, even those whom we disagree with or don’t see things eye to eye.

You see, Paul was writing to a group of Gentile believers in a diverse community in Corinth. The Corinthians were struggling with their inter-cultural relationship with one another. Paul exercised his Jewish and his Roman citizenship background to connect to as many people whom he associated with…Jews and Gentiles alike. To a Jew, he became a Jew. To a Gentile, he became a Gentile….to the rich as well as to the poor. He honored the traditions of those who were under the law as we as those who were outside the law. That’s what Paul means by “*becoming all things to all people*.” He used his dual citizenship towards his advantage in order to gain access to all people for Christ.

Paul’s mission and proclamation was central to the claim that God loves and reconciles with all who confess their faith in Christ. Paul tried to relate to all of God’s people, while respecting the “otherness” and the diversity of the body of Christ in becoming “all things to all people.”

How many of us have found ourselves in a similar situation like Paul’s (in a state of in-betweenness)? Those of us who have immigrated into this country or have lived in a multi-cultural environment such as here in New York, I’m sure, can relate to such experience. How many of you saw the TV sitcom ***“Fresh Off the Boat”*** on ABC earlier this week? It describes the life of an Asian-American family coping with living the American dream, while wrestling with many internal struggles of liminality (or in-betweenness) as the family moves from Washington, DC to Orlando, FL.

Even being a Christian living in a secular world in 2015, also prompted us to stand out (AND also stand up as well). On one hand, we are called to proclaim and to bear witness to our beliefs, while reserving judgment to others and even love those who despise and reject us. This is a difficult stands for us to make. Yet, that’s exactly what Christ is calling us to do.

**Being culturally sensitive to “others” and developing a heart for others in the name of Christ, create the framework in which we can foster our relationship with, within the body of Christ.** Our sense of identity and self-awareness shapes us into the person that God intended us to be. By the virtue of our baptism, God has claimed us and adopted us all as God’s children. Whatever we do, whatever we say or think shall ultimately be accountable to God…and we do it all for the sake of gospel and for sharing of God’s blessings to others. **God will give us the strength and opportunities to proclaim the gospel and to be a witness to God’s abounding hope and love.**

Furthermore, according to this passage, proclaiming the gospel is not just a task that we do, but an “obligation” and a sense of duty laid aside for us to fulfill. We’re all on God’s mission team for the world. It’s kind of like the postal service has an obligation to deliver letters from the mailbox or to the address that’s shown on the envelope. Rain, snow, or shine, In the same way, we too have an obligation to carry out this mission to proclaim the gospel.

In verse 16, Paul even gave us a warning of the consequences of us if we failed to fulfill such obligation. ***“Woe to us if we do not proclaim the Gospel!”*** We would be cursed! These are pretty powerful and harsh words that we do not often like to hear. We are doomed and deserved God’s judgment if we do not do what we are supposed to, as part of our calling in faith.

In his other letter to the church in Phillipi, Paul also address the similar subject of purpose in proclaiming the gospel for Christ. Paul wrote, *“Whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. 8 More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.[[2]](#footnote-2)*

In our Gospel lesson this morning, we read about Jesus and his disciples were going around the region caring for the sick, the poor and casting out the demons. Jesus went out of his way, broke down all social barriers, to meet and heal those who were living on the margins of society….the widows, the orphans, the sick, the demon-possessed. Many of these voices were often silenced and even ignored in our society. Yet Jesus took time out to care for them. He proclaimed the gospel not only with his mouth, but with His feet. He went to them and became “*all things to all people*” in reaching out to them. Part of Jesus’s mission was to demonstrate to all of us of what it means to serve and not to be served while putting the needs of others first before our own.

In a moment, we will be ordaining and installing new officers of the church, as elders and deacons. God has gifted us with many gifts and many talented people to serve. God has also provided us with many opportunities to proclaim the Gospel and to bear witness to God’s love to others. The Spirit has equipped us to serve with a variety of gifts…each according to our abilities.

*For there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of* ***wisdom****, and to another the utterance of* ***knowledge*** *according to the same Spirit, to another* ***faith*** *by the same Spirit, to another gifts of* ***healing*** *by the one Spirit, to another the working of* ***miracles****, to another* ***prophecy****, to another the* ***discernment*** *of spirits, to another various kinds of* ***tongues****, to another the* ***interpretation*** *of tongues.* ***All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses****.[[3]](#footnote-3)*

Imagine what that community might look like if we were to apply Paul’s vision in our society today? What if we can fully be the ones God intended us to be, with a high degree of autonomy and freedom, to carry out the mission that God has set before us.

*What if we can put aside all of our social stereotypes and barriers that we built up against one another, to look someone in the eyes, to see one another as God’s beloved sons and daughters and say “I LOVE YOU for who you are!” or “I FORGIVE YOU for what you’ve done!”*

*How would that community be looked like as we develop a diverse and welcoming community of faith, founded upon the reconciling love of God? Instead of saying we CAN’T or we WON’T do this or that, why not challenge one another in saying…WHAT IF?*

These new ways of thinking open up endless possibilities as we develop conversations, build relationships, share our lives, and our faith with others around us, with Christ as our mediator.

As the prophet Isaiah reassured us that God, our liberator, will renew the strengths of those who wait for Him. God will fulfill God’s own promise in accordance to God’s timing. We dare to depend upon our own wisdom and our own abilities but to place our trust upon God’s faithfulness and deliverance. *We shall be mounted up with wings like eagles. We shall run and not be weary. We shall walk and not faint.[[4]](#footnote-4)*

Friends, God has convened us and invited each one of us to take part of this Gospel proclamation and life transformation process. Over the years, it may appear that the church at large seems to have lost its prophetic vision and missional focus. We’ve focused more on ourselves rather than others. We’ve wrestled with internal turmoil and scandals while strategizing plans to keep the door opened.

But instead of thinking “half-empty”, I’d like to think of the church that is “half-full” with potentials. Perhaps this is God’s way of challenging us into a new era of proclamation of the gospel in the year 2015 and beyond. God is prompting us to extend our open arms to the “others”, as we seek a new vision in reclaiming the morals of society that has once lost.

May the Spirit give us ***Strength to Proclaim*** the living hope as transpired from the Gospel. May we communally seek Christ first in all that we do, in all that we say and in all that we pray for our future endeavors. God remains faithful upon God’s people from the beginning to the end. Christ has come, Christ is among us, and Christ will come once again.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *New Living Translation* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Philippians 3:7-8* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *1 Corinthians 12:4-11* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Isaiah 40:29-31* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)