

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 9:16-23

TOPIC: Paul knew who he was, but also how connecting with others gives others permission to know themselves too.

SUBJECT: The freedom to be yourself is the freedom to give others permission to become.

TITLE: The Way of Becoming

One of the things we often do during the continuing education gatherings I attend in Colorado Springs is to catch everyone up with what's going on in our lives. I think of it as a time to be honest, open and transparent with colleagues and friends who can relate to many of the joys and struggles of serving the church.

What I have found is that growing into my family system has helped me know myself far better than I ever imagined I would want to because who I am and how I am emotionally has implications for the way of becoming that continues shaping me. For me, the way of becoming involves recognizing how God is working to shape my life as God intends for God's purposes.

All that's required of me is that I let God shape my life. That's all that's required of you, too.

PRAYER

One of the most challenging beliefs people have to get over is that they can never change. It's taken me years to get past that belief, often because I once focused on an idealized past that was just as messy as the present and future will be. In fact, I have never known any human being who hasn't done this, as well.

Some theorists will say that every one of us experiences life in stages. For instance, I was sharing with someone the other day how a mutual friend practices faith from a place of certainty; he knows what he knows and there is no way anyone or anything can change that. I used to be like that when I was his age until circumstances humbled me and made me more welcoming toward questions, conversations, and stories.

Believing you know everything you need to know is dangerous because certainty makes you argumentative and impatient because certainty is nearly always stuck in the past. When someone idealizes the past, it's often idealized because of the way anxiety and ego interrupt the dialogue between a person's soul and God.

In today's passage from Corinthians, Paul speaks to this. He says "I'm free from all people, so I make myself a slave to all to recruit more of them." Paul brags of being all things to all people, which was a common speech tactic in his time. It's still used today, especially by professional athletes and politicians in an election year. What Paul is also declaring, however, is that he knows who he is ... not because of anything anyone told him or anything he told himself. Paul knows who he is because he listened and heard God direct him on his own way of becoming. Paul's greatest desire was to share the good news, so he could count himself as a partner with what God was doing and would do throughout an eternity that starts right now.

What Paul understood takes time to understand, so I share with you that the way of becoming is understanding what God's desire for you is. I've found that God's desire for me is rooted on life experiences that I don't choose, but that choose me. God guides you to figure that out when people embrace a continuous and constant contact with God, so they can realize the way of becoming humbles you so life is not just about you, but about God and others. Let me repeat that: *God's desires for people is to have a continuous and constant relationship with God, so they can realize the way of becoming humbles you, so life is not just about you, but about God and others.* Who are others? They're neighbors. All neighbors. And all means all.

The way of becoming means knowing God cares about you and people in your neighborhood. John Wesley referred to this as the world parish.

The way of becoming means urgently wanting to love yourself and your neighbors because you choose to get to know them and their stories, so it is possible to understand their lives.

The way of becoming means being consistent between what faith tells you and what you say you believe on social media.

The way of becoming means walking the talk, so your walking is your talking. As St. Francis of Assisi once said, “Preach always; use words when necessary.”

The way of becoming means working with God to challenge yourself to be more than you’ve allowed yourself to be in your worst moments, and better than you’ve been in your best.

The way of becoming means letting God challenge you in ways you never thought God would. The way of becoming means challenging things even if it means being run out of town, beaten by mobs, and thrown in jail like Paul was, and looking back and seeing how you did what was holy because it was what God had asked you to do.

Unlike Paul, I will never be all things to all people, and neither will you, and that’s OK; I don’t know about you but I don’t want to be all things to all people in a time when people struggle to know themselves. What matters – what really shows that you’ve followed the way of becoming – is when you’ve lived the vision, mission, goals, and dreams that showed others how much they matter to you and to God, just like Paul, and continued to pursue and embody a more excellent way.

In the name of the triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – one God in perfect community. Amen.