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UNLOCKING POTENTIAL: THE LIFE OF PETER - DISCERN Michael B. Beaugh
Matthew 16:13-19; John 21:15-17 January 27, 2008
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[Click on the following link www.youtube.com/watch?v=-qTiYA1WiY8 to see a 6 minute video about Patrick Henry Hughes. This will stir your heart.]

I saw Patrick Henry in Chicago in August at a leadership conference I attended. He was live and on stage with his father. Can you believe that father? This video affects me the way it did then. It just breaks me up. So heroic. So sad and yet so uplifting.

I wanted you to see this because we are talking about unlocking potential God has given each one of us. He wants to unlock it in our children and in our young people. He wants to unlock it in our churches so we can make a greater impact for Jesus Christ who changes lives that are hurting and saves us from evil.

I.

In this sermon series, we are looking at the life of Peter, the Apostle of Jesus, as our model of discipleship. What I see in the life of Peter is that God unlocks our potential as we grow in discipleship to Jesus. Peter was a fisherman by trade, but when Jesus called him and he decided to follow, he eventually ended up changing the world. Now we all hope to see St. Peter when we get to the pearly gates.

How did he get to this point? Well, one thing that happened is that Jesus helped him discern his gifts and his calling from God. **Discernment** is one of the 5 D's of Discipleship I keep talking about. [Two weeks ago, we talked about **Deciding** to follow Jesus. Last week, we talked about the importance of **Discovering** more about Jesus and his plan for us. Today we are looking at **Discerning** our particular gifts and calling. In the next two weeks, we will talk about **Developing** our gifts, and **Deploying** in mission and service to make an impact on the world for Jesus Christ.] It is essential for our growth as disciples that we discern where we fit in, what God wants of us. Knowledge alone, even decision alone, gets us nowhere.

In the two stories from Matthew 16 and John 21, we see Jesus helping Peter discern his gifts and his calling.

In Matthew 16, Jesus tells Peter he is going to build his church on Peter and others like him, and that Peter will have the keys of the Kingdom.

Some believe Jesus made Peter the head of the church and gave him absolute authority. That has always made me a little nervous and dubious. I believe the only head of the church with absolute authority is Jesus. Jesus

builds his church on the rock of daring faith and the church needs daring rock solid leaders, but God is in charge, not us. I believe Jesus means that every one of us has keys that can unlock heaven on earth in the hearts and lives of people. This is the potential we have and will realize only if we continue to grow as disciples.

In John 21, the resurrected Jesus meets with his disciples for breakfast on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus asks Peter about his love for Jesus. Then Jesus tells Peter to "feed my sheep." Tells him three times. "Peter, do you love me?" Search your heart Peter. You denied me three times. - Yes, Lord, you know I love you. - Then show it. Feed my sheep. Take care of my lambs. Build my church.

Peter went through a three year period of discernment with Jesus before he was ready to realize his potential. He had to learn what I have had to learn over and over in my lifetime. It is not about me. It is not about what I want or what I like. It is about what Jesus wants. I discover what Jesus wants through study of the Bible. And then it is about discerning what Jesus sees in me and wants of me. This is where the rubber meets the road. This is the hard part where many Christians stop growing.

This is where many churches stop growing. Potential dies on the vine of benign laziness. Discernment is hard work. It always leads to thinking outside the box. It always requires some sacrifice or change of personal attitudes and priorities. It is at the point of discernment that Satan throws up the most obstacles to keep us from going forward. In the lifecycle of the disciple, discernment is the climb to the top of the mountain until we see the grand vista on the other side.

II.

Over the past year, we have been in a discernment process as a congregation. We are trying to discern God's gifts and call to us so we can be more effective in making an impact on people's lives for Jesus Christ. I have been in a discernment mode myself. I used to think I knew how to lead a congregation, but the world has changed. I have been in a learning mode.

Last Sunday, I had hoped that our Annual Meeting would be a watershed moment for our church. Everyone had the opportunity to give their opinions about five key components that have the potential of unlocking our potential. I had hoped for a clear consensus on all five. We got a consensus and overwhelming majority in favor of three components: 1. Peace. Purpose. Promise. as our Core Message; 2. Changing the church's name to reflect our Core Message; 3. Moving forward with one of the four identified community needs as our Signature Ministry. On the other two components, a majority was opposed – 1. Starting a second worship service in 2009 to target a demographic group we are not reaching now, and 2.

Changing the Sunday morning schedule in September to get ready for the addition of the second worship service.

I hope everyone who attended felt like they were heard. Here is what I came away with. To keep doing things the way we have always done them is not an option. You sort of keep getting the same results. And I came away with an even clearer vision of how all the parts we have been considering over the past year could fit together.

Imagine Bob and Mary, a typical couple with two kids living in Southlake. They are living the good life, busy all the time, especially with children's activities. They feel the pressure of keeping up with the Southlake lifestyle, but that is why they moved here. They want good schools and a safe environment for their family. On Sunday mornings you can see Bob jogging and in the afternoon, Mary is playing tennis.

Then it happens. Cancer. Surgery. Chemo. Their world starts to slip. Their neighbor is a member of SBPC and tells them about the church's family counseling ministry. A good place to get support, encouragement, and help with the new issues in their lives. The neighbor also invites them to the coaching service at the church. It just happens that the series that month is called "After cancer, what then?" They will get strength and insight from the biblically based exploration of how God helps us through the tough times, along with great music and prayer for healing. Besides, the neighbor informs them, their children will be in Sunday School at the same time where they will get the support and encouragement of loving adults.

Bob and Mary decide to visit the family counseling ministry office of the church. They like the acceptance and understanding of their fears. They decide to attend the coaching service and find a spiritual presence that somehow begins to minister to their souls. Even after the series ends, they keep coming because they have made friends with others in their situation. And then one Sunday, a growing disciple who attends the regular worship service of the church but who also attends the coaching service, invites Bob and Mary to a small group gathering in his home. Bob is not sure he has the time for it, but Mary has noticed something in the members of the church that she is looking for. Besides, she relates to the church's vision and image, The Waterfall of God's Peace. She loves the fountain and the pool of water that the church has built, and imagines herself being washed clean and made whole again. She is beginning to realize that a lot of her life has been meaningless. She wants to be part of something where people are passionate about what is important in life. She gets an idea. What if she were to start a small group in her home for cancer survivors? And what if they found ways to raise money for cancer?

III.

Here is where my discernment is leading me at this time.

I believe God wants us to do whatever it takes to reach more people for Christ, making disciples who give their lives to make a difference in the world.

I believe that the new building we are planning is exactly what we need to help us accomplish this mission. We must not squander the opportunity.

I believe that a family counseling ministry could be our Signature Ministry. I keep thinking about Jennifer Medina, a member of this church killed recently by her husband. Could we have made a difference if we had had a counseling ministry where people could share their deepest needs and get help?

I believe that a coaching service, in which we address biblically the practical issues that families are struggling with, could be an essential part of our outreach.

I believe that we who are already a part of this church must reach consensus on our mission. We must continue growing as disciples and be ready to welcome and mentor new disciples who come our way.

Just for fun, I believe we need a compelling image that says what we are about. What about something like "The Waterfall of God's Peace" with a fountain and pool of water deep enough for baptisms?

We are talking about discerning God's gifts and call to us. We are talking about letting God unlock our potential. Remember Patrick Henry Hughes. How his parents lovingly brought out his potential. God is ready to do the same with us.