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Finding Ourselves

Philippians 3:12

Marcus Borg has described the experience of visiting the basilica in Assisi, Italy that is dedicated to the memory of Francis of Assisi. The church is filled with stunning mosaics created by Giotto. It has been described as a masterpiece of architecture containing some of the world's greatest art. Borg has pointed out the irony of creating this hugely expensive monument to honor a man who gave up his wealth and embraced poverty so that he could serve others. If Francis were to visit that basilica today he would undoubtedly be uncomfortable with its opulence. He would be quick to say "It's not about me." It is about the God who inspired him to change the course of his life so he could serve others. As he responded to this calling, he was transformed from a confused child of privilege, to a young man who had found himself in Christ (Christian Century, September 20, 2011, page 21).

In the third chapter of Philippians Paul describes a similar journey by which he came to find himself through a profound shift of identity. As a young man Paul's life was well grounded within the highly developed religious system of Judaism. Within this system he was a very privileged young man. He had been educated at the best schools. He knew the right people. He was a rising star within the religious establishment. He was well on his way to a very promising career occupying an elite position in his society.

But all that changed after Paul was blinded on the road to Damascus. When his sight is restored, Paul finds himself drawn in a completely different direction. He leaves behind all the advantages that he enjoyed as a young man. These things are no longer important to him. His life is re-defined by the grace of God which infuses him with the kind of righteousness that can only come as a gift. He finds himself in Christ. Paul says "Christ Jesus has made me his own" (Philippians 3:12). Paul is transformed into a man who lives to serve others as God has served him. Paul wants the Philippians to know that this is their vocation, too.

Joanna Adams tells of two friends who found themselves in just this way. They had been volunteering together in a night shelter at their church. They began to date and eventually fell in love and were married. Before long their family grew with the birth of a son and a daughter. But they remained very committed to the shelter and continued to serve as volunteers. One year when the children were little they became particularly concerned about one of the guests. He had two bouts with pneumonia that winter and was fighting a difficult battle with alcoholism. When he got sick again the couple invited the man to their house to live with them and their little ones until he got better.

When their pastor suggested that this could be very risky, they shrugged her off. They said, "We think Jesus wasn't kidding when he said 'I was a stranger, and you welcomed me'." They found themselves in Christ. They knew their calling was to serve others as God had served them (Journal for Preachers, Pentecost 2011, page 29).

This is the truth that Jesus had in mind when he told the parable of the tenants who refuse to accept the authority of the owner of the vineyard. They are turned out of the vineyard not simply

because they are killers. They are turned out because they did not live by their calling. They are called to obey the one who owns the vineyard. Because they refuse to do that, they are lost.

We are called to obey the One who created the world out of love. That means serving others as God has served us. As we embrace that calling we find ourselves in Christ.