Faith & Obedience
a.k.a. DOING EVERYTHING GOD COMMANDS
Genesis 6:11-22

Let's pray – Father God, creator of heaven of earth, would you come close to us today and illuminate the dark places of our hearts and lives so that we can hear your voice and find healing and hope in your presence. We ask that your Holy Spirit would touch us where we need your touch the most. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

INTRODUCTION – "BECAUSE GOD CALLED ME"

[Photo 1] Early in 1959 a young woman arrived in Hong Kong aboard a freighter.

She had no family or friends there and spoke no Chinese, but she planned to stay in Hong Kong, or China, if possible, for the rest of her life.

[Photo 2] Her desire was to be like one small candle – letting people know by her life that Jesus is the light of the world, and that he came to bring light and love into our lives.

When others would ask why she had left her home and family to come to Hong Kong, her answer was always very simple: "I came because God called me."

The oldest of 4 children, Ruth Smith was born in 1937 in Kitchener, Ontario.

[Photo 3] Her dad was a lab technician and her mom worked in a shirt factory. They both loved the Lord.

[Photo 4] When she was 18 months old, her parents heard a Chinese pastor from northern China, speak. They invited him to their home for dinner. That night he picked Ruth up in his arms and prayed for her. And from the time she could talk Ruth spoke of God calling her to be a missionary to China one day.

[Photo 5] Two years later, her Dad gave up his job to go to seminary. And when Ruth was ten, her family moved from Canada to South Dakota.

[Photo 6] Her father became the pastor of Pleasant Valley Church, a small church about 18 miles south of Miller.

[Photo 7] As the years passed, Ruth became more certain that God was calling her to China. She used every opportunity to prepare.

[Photo 8] For example, Ruth spent several summers while in high school and after graduation traveling through South Dakota and into Montana with her best friend, Darlene. They taught Vacation Bible School at numerous churches along the way.

[Photo 9] When she turned 22, Ruth said good-bye to her family and set out for Hong Kong. (At that time, mainland China was closed to Westerners, so Hong Kong was the closest she could get.) The people in her little church all gathered with her family to pray for her and send her on her way. She boarded a train in the middle of the night and traveled alone to California. There she took a freighter from San Francisco and traveled for 19 days by sea, arriving in Hong Kong on March 14, 1959. [Photo 10]

Upon arrival, Ruth had only the name and P.O. Box address of an English missionary woman some friends had put her in touch with: Vera McGillivray. Vera had planned to meet her at the dock, but Ruth's ship arrived 7 days ahead of schedule. When Vera didn't appear, the ship's engineer put Ruth in a taxi to Tsuen Wan [Photo 11].

Through God's providence, Ruth eventually found Vera walking down the path on a hillside. Having just come from the post office, Vera was still holding Ruth's unopened telegram telling the new date for the ship's arrival into Hong Kong Harbor.

[Photo 12] As Vera and Ruth walked together, past the village houses on the hillside, Ruth felt like she had come home to the place where she belonged.

[Photo 13] For almost 50 years Ruth lived and worked among the people of Hong Kong, sharing God's light and love with them. She learned to speak Cantonese fluently.

[Photo 14] Early in her work, Ruth met John, a Kansas native who was doing relief work among the many refugees in Hong Kong. John returned to the US where he attended Bible college.

[Photo 15] The 2 were eventually married in Ruth's home church back in South Dakota. John was ordained as a pastor and the 2 were and commissioned as missionaries in the same service.

[Photo 16] They returned to Hong Kong shortly after that. [Photo 17]

John and Ruth spent their early years together ministering to the young people in an already established church [Photo 18 -The Wai Chuen Church.]

Around 1970 the Lord led them to plant a new church. [Photo 19] This required them to go out into the town and the villages and find creative ways to build relationships with new people. A lot of the work of church planting is building relationships. Building relationships is time intensive work.

[Photo 20] It means being there and showing up when someone needs you.

[Photo 21] It means doing life together.

[Photo 22] It means investing in a core of people who can become your future leaders.

[Photo 23] It means taking regular breaks and going on furlough or vacation so that you can rest and recharge and be with family and friends who are supporting you and praying for you.

[Photo 24] This keeps you from burning out and enables you to go back into the ministry God has called you to in a healthier way. It also gives your young leaders a chance to develop in their gifts and sense of calling.

[Photo 25] When you come back it means picking up where you left off, and working again at building those relationships, and having fun together and reaching out to new people.

[Photo 26] There might not be a lot of people in your new church plant for quite a few years, because relationships and trust take many years to build. And helping people come to faith in Jesus and grow into a space where they can take on spiritual leadership when they have no cultural background in Christianity, takes many, many years.

But when God speaks and calls us to something beyond ourselves, and when we are willing to obey, and face challenges with courage and faith, and when we are willing to persevere over the long haul, God can do good things, beyond what we would have ever thought humanly possible.

During their early years of church planting, the Lord blessed John and Ruth with 3 children. [Photo 27] In case you haven't figured it out yet, I am one of those children.

I would not be standing here as your pastor today if my mom had ignored God's voice when he called her to be a missionary to Hong Kong and China. Had she refused to do what God asked of her, my parents would never have met, and I would not have been born.

And if my parents together had ignored God's voice when he called them to plant a new church in Hong Kong there are many spiritual brothers and sisters who would have never heard the name of Jesus. [Photo 28]

It was not always easy for my parents by any stretch of the imagination. In fact, many times it was very challenging work, with lots of obstacles to overcome, as church planting often is. [Photo 30] But with God's help they continued to use creative methods&

[Photo 29] And because my parents together persevered for over 30 years, in obedience to the voice of God, [Photo 31] when they retired and returned to America around 2002 they left behind a fully established and thriving church, of people who loved the Lord, were involved in missions and outreach, who cared for people with physical disabilities, and who continued to worship God wherever they moved to in the world.

For my mother to have done what she did in leaving home and family and going, halfway around the world, all alone, to a strange land where she didn't know anyone or speak the language took tremendous faith and courage. But she knew that God had called her and she went in obedience to his voice.

For my father to have also had his own sense of call and a willingness to partner with my Mom in returning to Hong Kong to share God's love with the people of Hong Kong for so many years took great perseverance and courage.

Something my Mom said once has stayed with me all these years. When God calls us to do something it is not just because it is good for those around us, it is because it is also good for us.

My Mom found being in Hong Kong and ministering among Chinese people was good for her. It suited her so well. She loved doing what God had called her to. For many years after her official retirement, she would return to Hong Kong for months at a time and help the church to continue to reach out to new families, so that they too might come to know the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. [Photo 32]

God's call is not a new thing.

Thousands of years before God called my mom and dad to share his love and life with the people of Hong Kong, God called someone else to play an even bigger part in His saving work. Let's read Genesis 6:11-22 and see what happened.

6 **11** Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. **12** God saw how
corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. **13** So
God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with
violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. **14** So
make yourself an ark of cypress[c] wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside
and out.

15 This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits
wide and thirty cubits high.[d] **16** Make a roof for it, leaving below the roof an opening one
cubit[e] high all around.[f] Put a door in the side of the ark and make lower, middle and
upper decks.

17 I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens,
every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. **18** But I will
establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your
wife and your sons' wives with you. **19** You are to bring into the ark two of all living
creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. **20** Two of every kind of bird, of
every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will
come to you to be kept alive. **21** You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten
and store it away as food for you and for them."

22 Noah did everything just as God commanded him.

HOW TO RESPOND TO THE CALL OF GOD

God called Noah to a monumental task - build an ark – a wooden boat big enough to house 2 of every land animal and 2 of every bird of the sky, as well as 8 human beings. And bring enough food to feed them all for many weeks to come, because God was going to send a massive flood upon the earth.

This would seemingly be an impossible task. Even if Noah could build a boat, how would he get the animals to come? There would have to be a partnership between Noah and God.

God provided the blueprint. He gave Noah very specific instructions for how to build the ark and what he was to bring in it. God's directions included what materials to use, what the dimensions should be, and even the need to include rooms.

This would likely be a decades-long project that required gathering lots of supplies and working very hard for a very long time. Noah would need to possess tremendous patience and perseverance as he worked. There would be challenges to figure out and obstacles to overcome.

He might cut his finger or hammer his thumb or pick up a splinter or two as he worked on the ark. He might wake up in the morning with a sore back after a hard day of hauling wood. Noah might even endure the ridicule of onlookers who had never seen water fall from the sky before and couldn't understand why he was building this seemingly foolish monstrosity in their backyard.

The task God called him to could easily have made Noah feel foolish to his peers as it defied human logic and what the eyes could see.

Has God ever asked you to do something that seemed far beyond your ability to do it? Has he ever called you to something that might make you look foolish in the eyes of your peers? How did you respond?

The most remarkable thing about this story is that Noah didn't question God's voice or God's plan. He simply got to work on it.

So we quickly get to the climax of this passage in verse 22 where we read –

> Genesis 6:22
> "Noah did everything just as God commanded him."

If someone wrote a commentary on your life, would that be the summary of it? That God called and you answered?

Would the record show that like Noah, you did everything just as God commanded you?

What if the task was decades long and required a great deal of time, energy and perseverance?

What if it was facing the wounds from your childhood by working with a Christian therapist so your anger and hurt don't leak or spill out onto everyone else around you?

What if it meant staying in a marriage that was less than satisfactory but working on the issues between you and inviting God in to help you find new life and new hope in that marriage?

What if meant changing careers?

What if it meant going into ministry?

What if it meant becoming a missionary or helping to plant a church?

What if it meant giving up an addiction or a bad habit?

What if it meant putting in less hours at work so you could be more present with your family?

What if it meant _____? You fill in the blank.

What has God been speaking to you about?

Did you know that Caitlin and Joel left Texas to come to CA to plant a church here in the Bay Area in response to God's call? They heard God's voice leading and nudging and they stepped out in obedience. And God brought them to us. We have the awesome privilege of partnering with a new church plant.

What does that mean for us? Well, it means that sometimes we get a little uncomfortable because sometimes we have to share space on the campus. Maybe we have to clean out some cupboards and make room for them to put things in. Maybe it means it takes energy and effort on our part to pray for them. Often during the prayers of the people we pray for them here in church. Are we being faithful to pray for them at home, during the week?

Is there something that God is calling you to do today? How will you respond to His voice?

But I guess that brings up another question. Because I guess if we are going to respond to God's call, we actually have to hear and recognize his voice.

Is that an easy thing to do?

Noah seemed quite confident that it was God speaking to him. The Bible doesn't tell us how he knew it.

How did he know it was not his own imagination or the equivalent of the aftereffects of some kind of ancient pizza he had eaten the night before?

The Bible doesn't tell us. It just says that God spoke and Noah obeyed.

I have sometimes wondered how my mother knew that God was calling her to be a missionary to Hong Kong from the time she could talk. She could never explain it. She just knew that she knew that she knew. And as soon as she was grown up enough to leave home and go, she went to Hong Kong in obedience to God's call.

Why doesn't everybody hear God speak that clearly? Is it because God doesn't speak to everybody? Or is it because we're not listening? Or creating space? Or because we are not willing to obey?

Fath and obedience are part and parcel of listening and hearing the voice of God.

Obedience requires that we have faith. And true faith requires that we obey, as Noah did - immediately, completely and over the long haul. Obedience to God is not a sprint. It is a lifelong marathon. It is not a onetime thing. It requires action each day, over a long period of time, to listen, to hear, to respond.

If we come to God in faith and are willing to obey what he says, we can trust that when God calls us to a task, he will also equip us for it. We also discover that, like Noah, we too can be participants in God's saving work in the world.

How does God speak?

One of the main ways that God speaks today is through the Bible, God's written word. Many people find that when they take time each day to be with God, to read his word, to listen and just make space for Him to speak, that things in the Bible just start to stand out. It begins to make more sense. They discover that the Bible is like a light to their feet and a lamp to their path.

There are general commands – Love your neighbor, pray for your enemy, give to the poor.

And there are also more specific things God says that are unique to each of our lives – For Noah, it was build an ark, for my mom it was go to China, for Caitlin and Joel it was move to the Bay Area and plant a church. What is God saying specifically in your life?

Often, we find that in community, as we pray together and we listen to others who are praying for us, that God's voice and God's leading become clearer.

Many people experience a sort of an inner nudge. It's not an audible voice per se, but more of a leading or an impression that the Holy Spirit brings to give guidance.

We're going to end today with the excerpt of a story told found in the Prayer and Devotional NIV Bible.

CONCLUSION – The Story of Mary Geegh

***"Mary Geegh** was a missionary in India. She faced many difficult circumstances and situations, but whatever she faced, she took to God in prayer. (p.832)*

Once there was a conflict between Geehg and a colleague. The woman had ten children and was often sick and couldn't carry out her work. Ghee was critical because this woman was trying to hold onto her job when she wasn't able to keep up with her responsibilities.

One morning Geehg was praying about the conflict, and God told her to take the woman one fresh egg. She wrote this about the experience: "A dozen fresh eggs might be reasonable – but one! That might insult my colleague. So I wrote it off and gave up for that morning. At noon when I came home, there was a chicken in the large armchair in my living room! The hen flew down and started to cackle, and there, on the chair, was one egg, freshly laid."

Greegh still argued with God: "She'll laugh at me."

God replied, "Results are not your business. Your business is obedience."

So Geegh took the egg to the woman's house. The woman's son was outside, and Geegh gave the egg to the boy and left quickly.

That evening the woman came to Geegh's house and asked, "How did you happen to bring that egg? It was so fresh and good."

Geegh answered, "I was praying and God told me to."

"Oh that's just like God!" said the colleague. "He knew I had nothing to eat this day. There wasn't enough food for all, so I went without. Then you brought the egg for me. When I ate it, I felt so satisfied and strengthened."

And that was the beginning of healing between Mary and her colleague.

Mary Geegh first learned about communicating with God and following his guidance from another missionary, Dr. L. R. Scudder. After seeing the remarkable way Scudder was led by the Holy Spirit in his ministry, Geegh asked him, "How do I begin to have the power of the Holy Spirit to help people?"

He replied, "The first step is to 'wait'…and 'be still'…'listen'. Then be definite about your sins—daily; with notebook and pencil, write down the things the Holy Spirit speaks to your mind; determine to obey. Then share with others who come to you for help how the power of Christ changes you.

Mary Geegh practiced quiet listening and obedience for the rest of her life until she died at the age of 101. Many of her experiences of guidance are recorded in a little book she titled simply, "God Guides." The stories are informative, astonishing and wise; and all are vivid demonstrations of how God delights to sweetly lead a humble servant who will listen and obey."

(Prayer and Devotional Bible, NIV, The Zondervan Corporation, Grand Rapids, MI. 2004, p. 832-833)

What is God calling you to do today?

Will you create space each day to wait, to listen, and will you resolve to obey?

Let's Pray:

BENEDICTION:

Numbers 6

24 "'The Lord bless you and keep you;
25 the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you;
26 the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.'