

2025-05-04 Third Sunday in Easter - Lawton

Summary

This sermon reflects on the unexpected nature of divine interventions, using personal anecdotes and biblical stories to illustrate how God's plans often differ from human expectations. The bishop recounts a surprise birthday party and the transformation of Saul into Paul, emphasizing how God's actions can lead to greater blessings than our own plans. Bishop also discusses Peter's renewal and recommissioning after denying Jesus, and Ananias' obedience in praying for Saul. He encourages the congregation to be open to God's call, to let go of their plans, and to serve faithfully, trusting that God will use them for His purposes.

Outline

Surprise Birthday Celebration

- Bishop Lawton shares a personal story about a significant birthday celebration that ended up being a surprise party organized by his wife.
- Despite initial grumpiness, he was pleasantly surprised by the party and reflected on how unexpected events can turn out to be better than planned.
- The story serves as an analogy for how unexpected events in life, such as divine interventions, can lead to greater blessings.

Saul's Transformation on the Road to Damascus

- He then recounts the story of Saul's encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, which led to his transformation into Paul.
- Saul was initially convinced he was doing God's work by persecuting followers of Jesus, but his life was upended when he met Jesus.
- Jesus' words to Saul, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" marked a pivotal moment in Saul's life, leading to his new mission.
- The story highlights how unexpected divine interventions can change the course of one's life and lead to a new purpose.

Peter's Renewal and Recommissioning

- The story of Peter's experience of going fishing after Jesus' resurrection and the miraculous catch of fish.
- Peter's encounter with Jesus on the shore led to a renewal of their relationship and a recommissioning of Peter's ministry.
- Peter's three-fold affirmation of his love for Jesus and his subsequent recommissioning by Jesus are emphasized.
- The story underscores the theme of unexpected divine interventions leading to renewal and recommissioning in one's life.

Ananias' Call to Minister to Saul

- The story of Ananias, a church leader in Damascus, being called by God to pray for Saul.
- Despite his initial reluctance due to Saul's reputation as a persecutor, Ananias obeyed God's call and prayed for Saul's healing and the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- Ananias' obedience led to Saul's transformation and the establishment of the church in Damascus.
- The story illustrates how God uses unexpected individuals and situations to fulfill His plan and calls on believers to be open to His will.

God's Call on Every Believer

- God calls every believer to a specific purpose and that it is essential to be open and responsive to His call.
- The speaker encourages the congregation to be willing to let go of their plans and be available for God's purposes.
- The importance of being open to divine interventions and willing to serve God's kingdom is highlighted.
- The speaker reassures the congregation that God's call is not limited to special individuals but is for everyone who is open to His will.

The Role of Faithfulness and Responsiveness

- The importance of faithfulness and responsiveness in fulfilling God's call on one's life.
- Bishop Lawton encourages the congregation to be faithful in their current roles and open to new opportunities for service.
- The story of Ananias and Saul is used to illustrate how God uses faithful individuals to accomplish His purposes.
- A call for a heart of openness and availability to God's call, regardless of the circumstances.

The Call to Serve God's Kingdom

- Bishop challenges the congregation to be willing to serve God's kingdom first, even if it means letting go of their own plans and dreams.
- The speaker emphasizes that God's call often involves unexpected interruptions and changes in one's life.
- The importance of being open to God's call and willing to serve wherever He leads is highlighted.
- The speaker reassures the congregation that God will use them faithfully and that their obedience to His call will lead to fruitful service.

The Power of God's Intervention

- Emphasis on how God's intervention in the lives of Saul, Peter, and Ananias led to significant transformations and new purposes.

- Encourages the congregation to trust in God's plan and to be open to His intervention in their lives.
- The story of Ananias and Saul is used to illustrate how God's detailed and precise plans can lead to miraculous transformations.
- Have a heart of faith and responsiveness to God's call, trusting that He will fulfill His purposes.

The Call to Worship and Service

- Concludes by calling the congregation to worship and service, emphasizing that God's call is for everyone.
- Be open to God's call and to serve Him faithfully in their current roles.
- The importance of being willing to let go of one's own plans and to be available for God's purposes is highlighted.
- A prayer for the congregation to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to be used by God to transform lives and bring glory to Him.

Application - How can we be more open and responsive to God's unexpected interventions in our lives?

1. Cultivate a humble and listening heart. Be willing to set aside your own plans and expectations.
2. Practice daily prayer and meditation, asking God to guide your steps and reveal His purposes.
3. Stay spiritually attentive by reading Scripture and being sensitive to the Holy Spirit's nudges.
4. When you sense a potential divine interruption, respond with "Yes" instead of immediately rationalizing or resisting.
5. Trust that God's plans are often different from your own, but ultimately better and more purposeful.
6. Be willing to step out of your comfort zone and take faith-filled risks when you sense God's leading.
7. Reflect on past moments where God has worked unexpectedly in your life, which can build confidence in His guidance.
8. Surround yourself with a community of believers who can provide support and confirmation when you sense God's call.

The key is maintaining an attitude of availability, saying "Lord, I'm willing" before knowing the full details of what He might ask.

Actions

- Pray and ask God to make you open and available to be used by Him.
- Consider how God may be calling you to serve Him, even if it doesn't fit your own plans.
- Be willing to let go of your own agenda to follow God's purposes.