**Repurposed for Christ**

**First Baptist Church, Albemarle**

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 Over the last decade, the idea of repurposing has become the new craze. If you grew up in the age of The Depression, you probably don’t understand why people are so infatuated with taking something old and re-using it for a different purpose. You probably have been “repurposing” all of your life since that is what you were taught since you were young. However, in the world of instant-everything, repurposing something old into something new has been a huge cultural shift. Today, taking an old bathtub and turning it into a loveseat is trendy. So is turning an old suitcase into a new cool, funky medicine cabinet in the bathroom. The shabby chic look is now back in style, even creating new furniture to look old and distressed. Through social media like Facebook, Pintrest and decorating blogs, ideas of repurposing have changed how we view something old and worn out into something new and fashionable.

 The idea of “repurposing” in our spiritual lives takes on a slightly different definition than repurposing of items. Repurposing an item means to take something that was intended for one purpose and change it in some way to have a different purpose. God’s initial purpose for our lives in creation has not changed. Genesis 1:26 says, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." God created men and women to have dominion over the earth and to participate in creating heaven on earth. This is still our purpose today. However, when sin and brokenness entered into the world, God had to provide another way for us to have communion with God and to participate with him in the creative process. We had to be “re-purposed” because we had lost our way.

 Isaiah was a prophet that brought the message of being “re-purposed” to an Israel nation that had turned away from the Lord. The northern kingdom of Israel had been carried into captivity (722 B.C.), and the kingdom of Judah was in the middle of idolatry and evil. The kingdom of Assyria had dominated and posed a major threat to both kingdoms; and the kingdom of Babylon was gaining power and would replace Assyria as the dominant threat in the near future. In view of the fast-changing international scene, the people of Israel were concerned about their future and what would become of God’s promises.

 Chapter 6 begins with an important phrase, “In the year that King Uzziah died…” King Uzziah was a righteous man and led his nation to honor the Lord. In 2 Chronicles 26, we read that Uzziah became the king of Israel at the wise age of 16 and he reigned for 52 years. In verse 4, Scripture tells us that Uzziah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father Amaziah had done. He was a successful military leader and Israel flourished under his leadership. His fame spread far and wide. However, Uzziah’s pride led him to his downfall and ultimately his death. He thought he could be both king and priest and entered into the temple of the Lord to burn incense at the altar, something that was reserved for only the priests. As his punishment, God struck him with leprosy, which ultimately led to his death.

 Isaiah, who served under King Uzziah’s leadership, loved the king and mourned greatly after his death. Biblical scholars believe that Isaiah was in a state of depression. Not only had Isaiah lost a king he had loved and served faithfully, but he was worried about how Israel would respond under the leadership of a new king. While in his state of depression, Isaiah experienced God in a real and personal way. Isaiah saw a vision. He saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted. The grandeur of God surrounded by seraphs that cried out, “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory” was majestic and powerful.

In visioning such a sight, Isaiah recognized his unworthiness and responded with great fear and humility. ““Woe to me!” he cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.” In Jewish tradition, people believed that those who saw the Lord would not live to tell others of the experience. When Moses boldly asked to see God face to face, he was instructed to hide in the cleft of a large rock. God covered the rock with his hand and passed by Moses, uncovering his hand in time for Moses to see God’s glory from the back. So when Isaiah saw the Lord in his vision, he covered his eyes and recognized God’s glory in its fullness. In God’s righteousness, Isaiah understood his and his people’s unrighteousness.

Then Isaiah experienced God’s grace when one of the seraphs brought a live coal from the altar with tongs and touched the mouth of Isaiah as a sign of forgiveness and atonement. Isaiah’s life changed in that moment. He was literally touched by God and saw God’s glory and majesty. In that moment, Isaiah was re-purposed and reaffirmed his calling. The Lord asked, ”Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” Isaiah replied, “Here am I. Send me!” Isaiah saw a Brighter Future, which is the title of our sermon series that I am starting today.

As apprentices of Jesus, what have we been called to? What is God asking of us in order for his glory to be seen and to be made known? Why has God forgiven us of our unrighteousness and repurposed us for a new life in Christ?

First, we have been repurposed for radical discipleship. When Jesus said to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him, it was an invitation to a better life. This call to apprenticeship is not easy. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer described in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, following Jesus is not without hard work and sacrifice of self. Bonhoeffer believed that “grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ is ***cheap grace***. Conversely, Bonhoeffer believed that “*costly grace confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus, it comes as a word of forgiveness to the broken spirit and the contrite heart. It is costly because it compels a man to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him; it is grace because Jesus says: "*My yoke is easy and my burden is light*.””* This call to discipleship or apprenticeship with Jesus is not to make our lives miserable or difficult. An apprenticeship with Jesus is an invitation to a life with the good and beautiful God in his kingdom where we experience transformation into Christ’s likeness. This fills us with joy, which means that we live in a state of provision, not lacking anything.

Bonhoeffer understood that apprenticeship was an invitation to a better life. He was a German theologian who took his discipleship seriously. He was a brilliant preacher, pastor, mentor and an apprentice of Jesus. He took very seriously of what Jesus preached in the Sermon on the Mount and lived his life in accordance to the gravity of Christ’s teachings found in Matthew 5 and 6. He was a leader among German churches and worked tirelessly against the Nazi regime and against Hitler’s unspeakable evil acts. He eventually became a main player in a plot to assassinate Hitler before being arrested, held in a concentration camp and ultimately killed, just two weeks prior to Allied forces liberating the camp. Bonhoeffer understood that by following Jesus in discipleship, he would be filled with joy and grace even when he suffered among others the horrible death in Nazi concentration camps. He knew that life as Jesus’ apprentice was better than anything he would experience apart from Christ.

Second, we have been repurposed for radical service. We have not been forgiven and given salvation to simply enjoy for ourselves. We have been given the kingdom of heaven to share with others. In a world filled with fear, hate, anger and brokenness, God has repurposed us to go out into our community and into the world to share his love and grace with the world.

Who will go to the rest home and talk to lonely people for a day? Who will spend time with the people who are starved emotionally and spiritually? Who will sign up to be a mentor to kids who need additional guidance and encouragement? Who will lead a Bible study in the prison? Who will serve the poor and the homeless at the Community Inn? Who will teach the middle school Sunday School class or care for the babies in the nursery? Who will go to Africa and love the children who are inflicted with AIDS? Who will be the voice for the women who are enslaved in the sex trade industry? Answering the call to serve others takes a sense of humility and a large dose of love. That's why Paul, in his famous love chapter in 1 Corinthians 13, makes it clear that service is not about the grand, heroic gestures. It's not about moving mountains, speaking with the tongues of men or angels, or sacrificing the body. It's about love. It is about the small things, the easily-overlooked acts of simple courtesy and love.

The voice of the Lord called to Isaiah, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And Isaiah said, “Here am I; send me!” (v. 8). Isaiah knew that forgiveness freed him to go in a new direction, not to return to his former ways. He believed that new life was being given to him so that he could follow Christ in radical discipleship and in radical service. He became one of the greatest of the prophets, speaking God’s word to a troubled, corrupt and sinful society.

What do you think God has forgiven you to do?

The world still needs courageous prophets who are willing to deliver the message “Thus says the Lord” to a society that is quick to block out God’s truth. But the world also needs teachers and counselors, lawyers and doctors, business leaders and accountants, as well as people of vision and energy and integrity in every line of work that is being performed today. So be a computer technician with compassion. Be a business leader with Christian vision. Be a teacher with a sense of discipleship.

If you are willing to answer God’s call, I ask you to simply answer each of the following questions just as Isaiah responded to the Lord, “Here am I, send me!” And the Lord asks,

Who will I send to the struggling single parent who often feels overwhelmed with responsibility?

Who will I send to the grieving parents who have lost a child?

Who will I send to the shut-in who has no transportation to visit the doctor?

Who will I send to teach our children God’s ways?

Who will I send to the fatherless child?

Who will I send to those without hope in prison?

Who will I send to the isolated senior adult in the nursing home?

Who will I send to the sick and the infirm?

Who will I send to tutor 9-year-old Johnny in reading?

Who will I send to my next-door neighbor?

Who will I send to City Hall to protest the treatment of the poor and disadvantaged?

Who will I send to the friend who needs intervention?

Who will I send?

Go, then, to the people.