## St Bridget Handout – Retreat Day

### Part 1. Called *by* God

(From: *The Stories We Live: Finding God's calling All Around Us*. Kathleen Cahalan. Eerdmans, 2017.)

Vocation is a central part of the Christian life, encompassing:

* *who we are called to be*—the core of our identity, as created by God and baptized in Christ, and sent forth to serve by the power of the Holy Spirit;
* *how we are called to live*—our commitments of lifestyle and relationships, including marriage, parenting, or the single life;
* *what we are called to do*—the work, service and activities that fill our daily lives, including paid or professional work, volunteering, homemaking, raising children or caregiving.

As a theological concept, vocation has received renewed attention in recent years, expanding beyond traditional definitions of ordained ministry to include the diverse ways we are called:

by the God who created us

to particular kinds of work and relationships

as the people we are, with our gifts, talents and resources

in a variety of circumstances, whether joyful or difficult

from difficult situations or times of transitions

through the example, invitation or mentoring of other people

for the service of others

within the life of God who is love

We are called *by*God, who is the source of our callings. We are called *to*follow the way shown by Jesus and taken up by his disciples; this calling we share with each other. We are called *as*unique persons with a particular history and circumstance. We are called *from*the losses and grief we suffer over time, so that we can embrace life again. We are called to give our lives *for*others, not simply for our self-improvement or fulfillment. We are even called *in*our deepest suffering to carry out God’s purposes in mysterious ways. We are called *through*the people in our lives, because vocation takes root in community. And, finally, we are called together to live *within*God’s loving embrace, both now and in the life to come.

Vocation is self-giving service for the sake of God’s world. Vocation is deeply personal because it is other-focused. God’s call is to you *for* love of neighbor and service *for* others. Jesus teaches, “’You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew 22:37-39). The truth about who you are and what you are *for* is the service you are called to give *for* others, *for* God’s world. Jesus gave his life *for* you, and discipleship entails giving it back. Vocation, then is self-giving service in community for the sake of God’s world.

**How do you know what your callings are *for*? In what ways are you called to serve? For whom is your service to be given?**

### Part 2. Called *as* We Are

(From: *The Stories We Live: Finding God's calling All Around Us*. Kathleen Cahalan. Eerdmans, 2017.)

God calls you as the person you are in the particularities of your life. You can only live our your vocation as the person you are; I can only become the person I am called to be in the context of my life. God’s call to you is not a generic calling, but is specific to your time in life and place in the history of the world. Vocation is God’s call to your life’s particularities as you know them, that which is a given in your life (gender, family, ethnicity, time in history) and what you can make of it (education, opportunities, relationships). Even your understanding of faith, vocation, and God arise from these contexts. You have been given this life, and you have to discover God’s call *as* you are.

Vocation is about the whole of your life, your whole life long. How was God calling you as an infant or child? And now, how might God’s call relate to your development as youth, young adult, adult, and older adult?

We develop in two ways: First you become a person, with a sense of who you are, through relationships with others; through in-between-ness of relationships, you construct yourself. Making meaning is the central way in which you form a sense of self, identity, and purpose.

The second way you develop is obvious: you change over time. You make transitions over the course of your development which require you to make new meaning from experience. Transitions disrupt your sense of self. Life is motion, and the motion of development requires you to make meaning with each new life phase. The way in which you negotiate each transition in the life span can determine how well or how poorly you live into the new situation.

Vocation, then, is Christian meaning making. It refers to the ways we “take in,” construct, reconstruct, critique, and identify what is significant in relationship to God and others. God’s call comes to use from birth till the end of our days in multiple and varied ways. You experience God’s call anew through particular developmental tasks that emerge in each part of the life span.

God’s callings are multiple and varied in your life, emerging in different ways, given your age and the life tasks you task. Vocation is not static or linear, but dynamic, sometimes fluid and at other times more stable. It is complex and multifaceted and is not determined once and for all in your life. Across the life span, God calls us as infants to gaze and behold, as children to play, as youth to begin exploring identity, as young adults to ask big questions and dream big dreams, as adults to love and work, in later stages of adulthood to step back and then step back in, and in elder years to give and to let go.

**How do you experience God’s callings at this age in your life?**

### Part 3. Called *to* Follow Jesus

(From: *Living Your Discipleship* by Kathleen Cahalan and Kelly Fanucci. Twenty-Third Publications, 2015)

Jesus called his disciples to follow him rather the disciples choosing to follow him. Jesus’s “way” was radical, requiring disciples to give up loyalty to job, family, friends, and nation in order to embrace Jesus’ way of life. As disciples of Jesus today, we are called in the following ways: to be a follower, a worshipper, a witness, a neighbor, a forgiver, a prophet, and a steward.

We have a common, shared calling as Christians. Discipleship is our most foundational and fundamental identity and vocation—we are called *together* to be a community of disciples.

**Jesus Calls the First Disciples**

*As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him. Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan. When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them. . . .* (Matthew 4:18-5:2)

The opening scene of Jesus’ ministry after his baptism is all action—he walks, calls, teaches, proclaims, cures, hikes, sits down, and speaks. If you are going to follow, you have to get and get going even if you are in the middle of something. If you don’t follow immediately, you are going to miss it: you won’t hear his teaching or witness him cure the sick or see the great crowds coming or finally sit at his feet to listen.

1. **How do you follow Jesus as a *worshipper*—one whose heart is filled with adoration and love for the source of life, the One on whom we depend?**

*When Jesus came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him.* *And then a leper[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/matthew/8" \l "48008002-1) approached, did him homage, and said, “Lord, if you wish, you can make me clean.”* *He stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, “I will do it. Be made clean.” His leprosy was cleansed immediately. Then Jesus said to him, “See that you tell no one, but go show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses prescribed; that will be proof for them.”*

*When he entered Capernaum, a centurion approached him and appealed to him,**6saying, “Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, suffering dreadfully.”**He said to him, “I will come and cure him.**” The centurion said in reply, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the word and my servant will be healed**. For I too am a person subject to authority, with soldiers subject to me. And I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come here,’ and he comes; and to my slave, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”* *When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, “Amen, I say to you, in no one in Israel[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/matthew/8" \l "48008010-1) have I found such faith. I say to you, many will come from the east and the west, and will recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the banquet in the kingdom of heaven,* *but the children of the kingdom will be driven out into the outer darkness, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.”* *And Jesus said to the centurion, “You may go; as you have believed, let it be done for you.” And at that very hour [his] servant was healed.* (Matthew 8:1-13)

Traditionally, Christians have worshipped God through different types of prayer: praising God in adoration, seeking God’s forgiveness through confession, thanking God for blessings, and petitioning God for our needs and those of others (ACTS: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication).

1. **How do you follow Jesus as a *witness* to what God has done for us?**

*While they were still speaking about this, he stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you.”* *But they were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost.* *Then he said to them, “Why are you troubled? And why do questions arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have.” And as he said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.* *While they were still incredulous for joy and were amazed, he asked them, “Have you anything here to eat?”* *They gave him a piece of baked fish; he took it and ate it in front of them.*

*He said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and in the prophets and psalms must be fulfilled.”* *Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. And he said to them, “Thus it is written that the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day* *and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.**You are witnesses of these things.* *And [behold] I am sending the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”* (Luke 24:36-49)

To be a witness means to give testimony, to proclaim, or to announce a message. Witness is to give testimony to the truth about what God has done for us, in and through Jesus Christ. When we live our callings, when we tell each other how God has called us, or when we admit how hard it can be to figure out what to do and what God wants—that is be a witness. It is tell a truth about our lives, about our certainties, and our doubts, our fears, and our joys.

1. **How do you follow Jesus as a *neighbor* to those around you?**

*There was a scholar of the law who stood up to test him and said, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”* *Jesus said to him, “What is written in the law? How do you read it?”* *He said in reply, “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.”* *He replied to him, “You have answered correctly; do this and you will live.”*

*But because he wished to justify himself, he said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”**Jesus replied, “A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down that road, but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side.* *Likewise a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side.* *But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight.* *He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him.* *The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, ‘Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back.**’ Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers’ victim?” He answered, “The one who treated him with mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”* (Luke 10:25-37)

Jesus neighbor ethic is built on the Great Commandment that unites love of God and love of neighbor. Jesus expands his teaching on neighbor to the point of embracing love for one’s enemies. Jesus tackles the question of who is the neighbor in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).

Neighbors are neighbors (people we know), strangers (whether near or far), and enemies (critics and opponents). By stretching our instincts past our comfort zone to include these widening circles of neighbors, strangers, and enemies, we enter into discipleship’s view of “neighbor-hood” as a state of being in which all are drawn together in the household of God.

1. **How do you follow Jesus as a *forgiver*—to forgive those who harm us and seek forgiveness when we harm others.**

*A Pharisee invited him to dine with him, and he entered the Pharisee’s house and reclined at table.* *Now there was a sinful woman in the city who learned that he was at table in the house of the Pharisee. Bringing an alabaster flask of ointment,* *she stood behind him at his feet weeping and began to bathe his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and anointed them with the ointment.* *When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, that she is a sinner.”* *Jesus said to him in reply, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” “Tell me, teacher,” he said.* *“Two people were in debt to a certain creditor; one owed five hundred days’ wages[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/luke/7" \l "50007041-1)and the other owed fifty.* *Since they were unable to repay the debt, he forgave it for both. Which of them will love him more?”* *Simon said in reply, “The one, I suppose, whose larger debt was forgiven.” He said to him, “You have judged rightly.”* *Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? When I entered your house, you did not give me water for my feet, but she has bathed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair.* *You did not give me a kiss, but she has not ceased kissing my feet since the time I entered.* *You did not anoint my head with oil, but she anointed my feet with ointment.* *So I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; hence, she has shown great love.[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/luke/7" \l "50007047-1)But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.”* *He said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”* *The others at table said to themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?”* *But he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”* (Luke 7:36-50)

Learning to be a forgiver begins with first recognizing that I am a sinner and that my actions hurt other people. I have to start with seeking forgiveness. When I am forgiven, then I know love and I can learn to practice forgiving others. Forgiving others for their sins against me requires great love.

1. **How do you follow Jesus as a *prophet*—to declare what is wrong with our communities and world, and call people back to right relationship through justice and mercy.**

*They came to Jerusalem, and on entering the temple area he began to drive out those selling and buying there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves.* *He did not permit anyone to carry anything through the temple area. Then he taught them saying, “Is it not written: ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples’?* *But you have made it a den of thieves.”* *The chief priests and the scribes came to hear of it and were seeking a way to put him to death, yet they feared him because the whole crowd was astonished at his teaching.* *When evening came, they went out of the city*. (Mark 11:15–19)

To be a prophet is to see what is wrong, broken, missing, or unjust in our society and to speak a word of truth that shines light on the situation. Prophets see the world as God sees the world and seek to share their vision with others.

Acting prophetically is at the heart of what it means to follow Christ. To be a prophet can be an uncomfortable part of the call to discipleship. But it is also what I cannot *not* do as a follower of Christ. What is unjust about our time and place? How are we complicit in systems that contribute to the oppression of others? Where do we need to help call people back to God’s ways of mercy, forgiveness, justice, and peace?

1. **How do you follow Jesus as a *steward*—caring for God’s creation and the goods of the household.**

*“It will be as when a man who was going on a journey called in his servants and entrusted his possessions to them.* *To one he gave five talents; to another, two; to a third, one—to each according to his ability. Then he went away. Immediately* *the one who received five talents went and traded with them, and made another five.* *Likewise, the one who received two made another two.* *But the man who received one went off and dug a hole in the ground and buried his master’s money.* *After a long time the master of those servants came back and settled accounts with them.* *The one who had received five talents came forward bringing the additional five. He said, ‘Master, you gave me five talents. See, I have made five more.’* *His master said to him, ‘Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master’s joy.’* *[Then] the one who had received two talents also came forward and said, ‘Master, you gave me two talents. See, I have made two more.’* *His master said to him, ‘Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master’s joy.’* *Then the one who had received the one talent came forward and said, ‘Master, I knew you were a demanding person, harvesting where you did not plant and gathering where you did not scatter;* *so out of fear I went off and buried your talent in the ground. Here it is back.’* *His master said to him in reply, ‘You wicked, lazy servant![\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/matthew/25" \l "48025026-1) So you knew that I harvest where I did not plant and gather where I did not scatter?* *Should you not then have put my money in the bank so that I could have got it back with interest on my return?* *Now then! Take the talent from him and give it to the one with ten.* *For to everyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.* (Matthew 25:14-29)

The call to stewardship means receiving gifts gratefully, nurturing their growth, and sharing them with others. The call to stewardship is the call to take care—of people, of places, and of talents and skills we have been given to share. Like the stewards in Jesus’ parable, we have been entrusted with God’s gifts in the expectation that we will allow them to grow over time. So we are called to be steward with our whole lives: stewards of our work and of our world around us.

**Conclusion**

We follow the One who follows in Abba’s way, for Jesus is the perfect disciple, the perfect follower. He teaches disciples what it means to embrace God’s mission with our whole lives when he accepted his death and placed his trust completely in God. In order to flow, we must come to him, sit at his feet, and learn how to do this. To be a follower means entering into a lifelong process of learning from Jesus, to come to know who and what Jesus is and what Jesus is claiming about God’s call to community and mission.

We live, then, in Christ because Christ lives in us. To be Christ’s follower is to embrace Christ as teacher, to seek wisdom and understanding for what the path and cost of discipleship entails, and to be schooled in the paschal mystery of death and new life.