

“Turned On”
 Brookfield Congregational Church
 September 26, 2010
 Text: Acts 1: 1-11

What's it all about, Alfie?
 Is it just for the moment we live?
 What's it all about when you sort it out, Alfie?
 Are we meant to take more than we give
 Or are we meant to be kind?

In the 1966 British Film, “*Alfie*,” Alfie Elkins (played by Michael Cane) lives a loose and troubled life and at the end of the film he finally decides to change his ways and settle down. Unfortunately, Alfie’s heart is broken and as he wanders off into the end credits, Cher’s recording of, “*What’s it All About Alfie*,” asks the question that comes to all of us at one time or another.

“What’s it all about?”

Have you ever had a time when that question – or some form of it – grabbed you by the throat? *“What is it all about?”*

For the past two weeks we have actually been exploring the core of our faith.

- We are **Connected** – that is “Plugged In” to God and to each other
- We are **Called** – That is “Charged Up” as we embrace the fact that God comes to every single one of us – where we are – and calls us to bring something of God to a hurting world. And finally...
- We are **Committed** – that is “Turned On” as we discover that God alone can give us the strength to live out this call. There is a saying I love that says, “*The call of God will never lead you where the grace of God cannot keep you.*”

I want to pick up the story of Peter (and our story) where we left off last week. Peter had discovered the meaning of **his** life... the answer to **his**, *“What’s it all about...”* when he dropped his nets, left his home and began an adventure that would change his life – and **amazingly** ours!

Kathleen ended last week with this: *“...for this week, we must be content to stand on the lakeshore with Peter, bent over our empty fishing nets, listening to the voice of Jesus calling us to follow. We don’t know where we’re going. We don’t know what we’ll do separately and together to follow his call. We’re just here on the lakeshore, getting ready to go.”*

And so let us go just a bit further with Peter. It was the most amazing day of his life when he dropped the nets and followed the man with power in his words and the joy of God in his soul. What a beginning it was! Within days crowds were gathering all over Upper Galilee... news of the man from Nazareth with the touch of God in his hands and the voice of God in his words spread like wildfire. Peter and his friends found themselves at the center of a spiritual firestorm that turned the religious world upside down.

Mark captures the sense of excitement that followed this entourage of a carpenter, fishermen and assortment of everyday folk. Folk like you and me. After a long day and one final healing, Mark notes, *“This amazed everyone and they praised God saying, ‘We have never seen anything like this!’ ”*¹

And I can imagine Peter standing back watching the crowds and his new leader thinking, *“This is gunna be good. This is way better than fishing!”*

And so you would think that everyone would be happy, even overjoyed... right? Actually not!

Mark has another comment... A comment that says right up front in this following Jesus thing. **“Danger! Warning!”** Taking the call of Christ seriously will bring the greatest challenges of your life! Listen to Mark once again...a short comment that almost sneaks by you after another teaching-healing session, *“Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.”*² This is an amazing alliance. The Pharisees and Herodians hated each other. They had opposite views of how Jews should relate to Rome. They illustrate the old line, *“The enemy of my enemy is my friend!”*

Fast forward... Jesus and company move through an amazing ministry. Mark is the best gospel to pick up the urgency and swiftness of Jesus time on earth. A crisis looms and finally the maelstrom begins in a small upper room in Jerusalem just hours before Jesus' arrest. You remember the scene well. We relive it every time we celebrate Holy Communion. Jesus predicts his betrayal and arrest. Peter and company are absolutely nonplussed as Jesus says, *"I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me – one who is eating with me."*³ Peter declares that he would never deny Jesus. Jesus responds by saying before the rooster crowed twice, Peter would deny him three times. Peter's retort is fervent, *"Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you!"*⁴

Fast forward again... Jesus has been arrested and in the evening shadows a servant girl says Peter was one of Jesus' band. *"Nope... don't know the man Peter says twice."* Peter distances himself from the crowd – and from Jesus and finally all hell breaks loose as he is once again identified as a follower of Jesus and he responds with a profane outburst that would make a fisherman blush. ***"I don't know this man you're talking about!"***⁵

And at the end of an exhausting night in the dim light of an impending dawn a rooster crows. And Peter breaks down..... *and that shattering sound you hear in the echo of your soul* is the myth of self-sufficiency crashing to the ground.

Sooner or later we all come to a moment when we stare our frail humanity in the face, our best efforts fail miserably even though we exhaust ourselves in the trying and we find ourselves looking up and reaching out ... *"O God, I cannot do this without you!"*

Last week Kathleen pointed out that all the great stories in the bible are stories about call... Abraham and Sarah, Moses, Joshua, David, Jesus, Peter and Paul. And you know something else? Every one of those stories is a story about someone who has come to the end of their own strength and realized that God alone can give us the strength to carry out the call we've been given. Every one is a story about common, ordinary people like you and me who discovered the secret of being empowered by the Spirit of God!

- Abraham and Sarah said, *“We are too old, we cannot do it!”* And God said, *“I will give you a land!”*
- Moses said, *“I’m nobody, I can’t lead these people out of slavery!”* And God said, *“I will be with you to lead them.”*
- When all the soldiers of Israel stood shaking in their boots at the sight of Goliath and were ready to negotiate terms of surrender, a teenage shepherd boy named David who knew God was the source of strength said to Goliath, *“You come against me with sword and spear, but I come against you in the name of God... this is God’s battle!”*⁶
- Ah – and Jesus himself, immediately after his call goes into the desert where he endures incredible spiritual struggle for 40 days... and does he come back from that desert to accomplish his call in his own human strength? Luke is very clear, *“Jesus returned to Galilee **in the power of the Holy Spirit** and news about him spread throughout the countryside.”*⁷

Back to Peter’s story. After he denied Jesus, then watched his crucifixion, he was crushed and figured it was all over. Back to the nets and the stinky fish. It all faded like a dream. BUT... the story is **not** over. On Sunday morning after the crucifixion, three women come to the tomb and are startled by an angelic being who says, *“Go tell his disciples **and Peter**, he is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him!”*⁸

The first time I read the bible through and came to these **two little words** in Mark, I was in tears. You see – I’ve learned so much the hard way as they say. I’ve stumbled and had my share of heartbreak and failures. Yes – Peter is certainly my brother in spirit! Yet – God wants to make sure that Peter is included. In spite of his gigantic failure... **he is included!**

Do you see? Can you grasp the power in these words? **“And Peter...”** I read, **“And John...”** This amazing, incredible grace of God is for me... and for you. As we say often in the United Church of Christ, *“No matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here!”*

As we conclude this three part series I want to take you to just a few words in our reading from Acts. *“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you...”*

When we are **“Plugged In”** we are connected – to God and to each other – we discover the heart of what we were meant to be in community. And when we are **“Charged Up”** we discover that each of us – without exception has a call from God – a God-given purpose that becomes the central meaning of our lives. And finally we are **“Turned On”** when we realize that we do not live in our own strength, but receive power for living through the power of God’s Spirit in us.

And so... we are on this journey – sharing Peter’s story, your story, my story, our story as a family of faith and a community of grace.

Now... the three themes we have talked about can be translated into simple spiritual practices that can help us grow in faith. We will post a short guide on our website soon. But for now – use these three themes in your daily life – something like this.

As soon as you can after you wake in the morning – get “Plugged In” and establish conscious contact with God. Something like: *“O god as I enter this day, I do so knowing that you can walk with me.”*

Then somewhere early in your day, you turn consciously to God again to get “Charged Up” with something like, *“As I move through the hours of this day O Christ, help me to see with your eyes.”*

Finally... keep somewhere near the surface the notion that you do not have to live in your own strength as you face situations that are challenging and you ask to be “Turned On” with something like, *“O Spirit of God, I need your strength as I face this experience.”*

You will be amazed as the days and weeks go by how your life grows closer to the one who designed you and loves you best!

And ***that*** is what it’s all about Alfie!

¹ Mark 2:12

² Mark 3:6

³ Mark 14:18

⁴ Mark 14:31

⁵ Mark 14:71

⁶ I Samuel 17:45-47

⁷ Luke 4:14

⁸ Mark 16:7