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## **The Wheel of Becoming**

Isaiah 40:28-31

**We claim God's gift of becoming when we choose to allow God's movement in our lives.**

P-B-P-G-I-N-F-W-M-Y. I was just a little girl when those letters entered my life. Little did I know the guiding force that they would offer to me! Little did I know the question they would bring to the fore and little did I know the lesson that I would learn from them. Those letters decorated the pin my mother donned as she came home from a conference. "What was that?" I asked her. What did all of those letters mean? Those letters, she said, were about becoming. They stood for a sentence, "Please, be patient, God is not finished with me yet."

P-B-P-G-I-N-F-W-M-Y. To her surprise, the woman who found herself in a Starbucks Café would find those letters, though stated differently, to become significant in her life. It was in that Starbucks when her identity crisis began to come to a head. A woman approached her in awe and said to her "Oh, Mrs. Kennedy, I mean, Kennedy Shriver. Oh my, I mean Mrs. Kennedy Shriver Schwarzenegger! Oh, Mrs. First Lady—Mrs. Governor! Oh my!" In her calm demeanor, Maria Shriver said simply, "Call me Maria". At that moment, Maria Shriver's journey toward redefinition began. That experience caused her to reflect on who she was. She was so taken by the variety of personas that had been hers. She grew up amid Camelot. She was a child of two very strong and accomplished parents. She married a movie star. She became a journalist and the First Lady of the State of California. She had become an amazing person but with all of the roles of her life she really wasn't sure who she was anymore. Questions permeated her thoughts "Who was she . . . and who was she to become?"

The same question loomed large in the lives of the Hebrew People. The prophet Isaiah was practicing his ministry around 700 B. C. At that time, the Assyrian Empire was expanding and Israel was on the decline. It was his job to let the Jews know who they would become. So, he prophesied that Jerusalem would fall. Amid his doom and gloom projections and toward the later years of his life, Isaiah's tune began to change. Those letters may as well have been his prophesy for Judah. P-B-P-G-I-N-F-W-M-Y. He began to speak less about the sins of Judah and more about God's saving grace—more about the fact that God was not finished with Israel. In chapters 40-66, he writes of hope, of renewal and of becoming.

Hear his words from Isaiah 40:28-31: **READ SCRIPTURE.**

But being faint was what the Hebrew people were feeling. As Isaiah's prophecy reached fulfillment, their lives were turned upside down. They were cast out from the homes they had known. They believed that God had deserted them and they practiced trusting only in themselves. Desolation and displacement characterized their physical and spiritual existences. They were left wondering that same question. Who are we now? Without our God, without our land, how do we define ourselves?

So, it is that the P-B-P-G-I-N-F-W-M-Y encouragement of Isaiah was a word that began to quench their thirsts. What Isaiah began to lay out for them was a pattern for their renewal and rebirth as the people of God. It was a wheel of becoming, if you will.

In ancient pagan traditions and especially in Buddhism, there is a complex diagram that they call the bhavacakra or the wheel of becoming. It is a chart of sorts that lays out one's spiritual development. I confess that I do not understand it in its complexities, nor do I fully buy into its theory but I cannot help seeing the correlation to Christianity.

The chart suggests that we begin our lives in ignorance and as we grow, if we are open, we move past that stage to the others of higher development. The Buddhist perspective is that we can arrest in our development at any time and whatever stage in which we end this life, we would be reincarnated beginning at that level in the next life.

I don't believe in reincarnation because I believe in eternal life. But, I do believe that we go through cycles of growth in our lives not unlike the wide angle picture of the wheel of becoming. If we step back to look at the bhavacakra we find that it offers a cycle of birth that leads to life through which we learn all manner of lessons. That life and those lessons lead us to rough patches, sufferings we call them. Those rough places are opportunities that we can seize or not but if we choose to seize them, they lead us to re-birth and more lessons yet to learned as long as we are open.

Isn't the Christian life like that? We live in lives of ignorance until we have a personal experience with Jesus Christ that we call conversion. We seek through life with Christ to grow closer to God. We find out that just because we are Christian doesn't mean that we don't suffer, but we learn that the suffering makes us stronger and wiser. We learn that we are better for having lived through the cycle and that we live more closely with God.

Isaiah paints his own wheel of becoming that leads to renewal. His wheel is couched in questions that we must pose to ourselves if we are to find renewal:

1. Do I depend on myself or on God? If we are going to find renewal in our lives we must first be willing to release our ways of being in the world and be willing to be helped—by God. This is surrender. At a very base level, when we choose to allow God's movement in our lives, we claim God's gift of becoming.
2. Do I know how to be patient? The scripture calls it "waiting on the Lord." The Hebrews understood waiting as anxious anticipation. So that to be patient was to trust God so much that you had faith that whatever happened in life was as it should be. To have patience was to have the knowledge that God was at work in ways that weren't up to the people.
3. Do I accept God's grace? If we can accept God's grace, then there is nothing to deter us from constantly dedicating ourselves to God's service, to constantly clinging to our faith in any circumstance, and to constantly seeking God's guidance for our every step.
4. Do I claim God's joy? When we live in God's joy, we soar. That soaring occurs because we are able to glean joy in all things. We are able to claim perseverance.

Isaiah's wheel of becoming leads back to that very first point that when we choose to allow God's movement in our lives, we claim God's gift of becoming. Isaiah exhorts the people to understand that all of life is about becoming and becoming closer to God. They must simply

claim those letters—P-B-P-G-I-N-F-W-M-Y. Please be patient, God is not finished with the Hebrews yet. Their story goes on.

Maria Shriver found that for all of the wonderful things of her life, that God was not finished with her yet—that she is on that wheel of becoming and becoming closer to God but that she must be patient and let God unfold the path. Her story goes on.

Sixteen weeks ago, I stood before you in the beginning stages of our Senior Minister's sabbatical leave. At that point in time, I had a clear image of Richard Kremer in my mind that I could not shake. I watched him day in and day out in those days prior to his departure. He was not the man that I had known. His eyes were weary. There were fewer smiles and rare were the occasions that his wonderful guffaw would eke out. His shoulders sank and from my vantage point it seemed as if he were so tired, that he just wanted to run away.

Over sixteen weeks ago, you gave your pastor who for 16 years has poured himself out for your sake, because he loves you, the chance to surrender himself again, to practice patience, to claim God's grace and God's joy and in so doing you have allowed him the chance to experience the wheel of becoming—of growing closer to God—of growing closer to his family—and of finding renewal. Richard Kremer knows that God is not finished with him yet. His story goes on and it will go on in this place as our pastor. Richard returns to the pulpit next week but back to the office on July 1<sup>st</sup>. I am asking you to embrace him not only as your preacher but as your pastor as he returns next Sunday. But, I am also asking you to continue to give him the gift of renewal as we offer him space to finish his sabbatical experience, space to come back to us fully and fully renewed. I am asking you to continue to allow him this time of claiming God's movement in his life and therefore claiming God's gift of becoming.

You will recall that in late December I had my doubts about my abilities, fear had been a part of my anticipation of this sabbatical period and I exhorted you to stand up and be the church because I knew that none of us—your ministers—could do it on our own. You have done that! You have stood up. You have been the church. And now I beg you to not stop what you are doing! This church—you--are thriving—you are renewing and it is clear that you are allowing God's movement among this corporate body. In that allowing, you are claiming God's great gift of becoming!

I want to personally thank you for the ways that you have allowed me to be minister to you in these weeks and for the wonderful ways that you have been minister to me. As Richard returns to lead us in the next cycle of our becoming as a church, my prayer for all of us that we will claim God's movement in our corporate life as the body of Christ and that we will know God's great gift of becoming! P-B-P-G-I-N-F-W-M-Y. Please be patient, God is not finished with St. John's Baptist Church yet . . . our story goes on! Amen.