

Spiritual Biography

Only heightened in this interim period of pandemic waiting, I find the scriptural narrative of dispossession and God's continued re-formation of God's people in community to be operative in my spiritual practice and vocational practice of ministry. As the son of a second-career pastor, familiar with uprooting and moving places every few years, it also represents the primary, if complicated, entry point for solidarity with those who are dispossessed and disinherited in our common life.

My family has been its own community where dispossession has always been met with the courage of faith to step out on a limb for something true and good. My earliest memories are of my parents sensing the call for my father to attend seminary, concurrent with the decision to adopt my younger sisters. This was nurtured in my larger family, set within the complications of white Southern cultural Christianity while performing spiritual bricolage from its rich resources. Even as a young child without the right words to yet give utterance to my faith, I was given a sense of participation and ownership in the ministry of the church, which in turn became a place for gifts to be nurtured, friendships to be formed, and new forms of gathering to be practiced. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina during my father's first call in New Orleans, I saw the ways in which my own dispossession could be a meeting point to others' far worse struggles, enmeshed in social systems of extraction and inequality. In a small town in rural North Carolina, I was awakened to how the church's gathering could be diseased by enmeshment, leading me to leave faith and church life for a time. In the resulting time of deep wrestling and discovery, I came to encounter different voices in mine and other traditions and began to find the words to articulate a sense of faith, claiming with boldness Christ's saving work in my life by the power of the Holy Spirit. In a large church in Dallas, Texas, I saw church in its institutional realities while learning to find meaningful transformative community in a supportive youth group.

Finding the vocational expression of my faith in adulthood has often been marked by revisitation. I left for my undergraduate years at Texas A&M with a vague interest in service and engaging issues of social inequality. I majored in International Politics and Diplomacy, studying abroad in Jordan and interning in domestic nonprofits. I spent a summer in New Orleans working for a ministry of that same church, facilitating a social justice education program with mission for youth. I also revisited complicated institutional forms of gathering and formation as a member of the Texas A&M Corps of Cadets, growing as a leader by balancing community formation with the organization's mission to form military leaders. Attending the seminary on which campus I grew up another revisitation. In Richmond, I grew in gifts of teaching and preaching, in community organizing and organizational leadership, and being a more capable and thoughtful pastoral presence.

Always on the move, this pandemic season has been one of impatiently sitting still while finding other ways to form community, online and off, continue to be confronted and astonished by God's Word in Scripture, and to serve the dispossessed and disinherited. As I contemplate where God has positioned me in vocational ministry, I am drawn to serve the forms of community that have brought me into being with creativity and a discerning ear to step into God's future.