

Sine Domino Frustra Laboramus

5th Sunday after Epiphany
February 7 2010
Glendale Lutheran Church

WORTHY OF THE CALL...TO BE 'CHURCH'
Isaiah 6:1-8 / 1 Corinthians 14:12b-20 / Luke 5:1-11

I.

It's wonderful when all three of the appointed lessons for the day complement one another, as it is today; particularly, the Old Testament text from Isaiah 6 and the choosing of the Twelve to be the Lord's disciples. Both of them are about "The Call" to serve the Lord in a special way. Regarding Isaiah, the only time I have used this as a text was for the Installation of Todd Kollbaum as pastor of Trinity, in Cole Camp, MO 6 years ago. I said then, a pastor who responds to the Call of God to serve God's people ought be like Isaiah, who first turned INWARD, to see his total lack of worth before Almighty God, to realize that before God he (or she in many denominations) is defenseless, deficient, dependent, and undeserving of God's fullness of love. Then, I said, this prophet – and the pastor -- turned UPWARD, to see the majesty of God as well as the mercy of God, and to be awed by both, and the forgiveness of his sins was unparalleled, inexplicable, empowering and enabling mercy at its finest. Finally, I said, this mercy moved the prophet and pastor to turn OUTWARD, reaching to people who have need to hear and experience God's simply powerful love and grace. And the Lord said to Isaiah, "Whom shall I send?" And the prophet responded in faith and obedience, "Here am I; send me."

What made him “worthy of the Call” to serve the Lord? Nothing, absolutely nothing on his part – it was all God’s idea!

Actually, there is a theme here. Last week’s Old Testament was the Calling of Jeremiah who, in the first chapter, divinely inspired wrote, “The word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born, I set you apart, I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.’” And Jeremiah tried to escape because of his young age, but God wouldn’t let him go. In both instances, these prophets received The Call, and both objected at first, but were compelled to respond anyway!

I’ve read that ‘biblical commissionings begin with theophany.’ In other words, those persons who were called to be about the special business for the Lord first encountered the manifestation – the epiphany – of Almighty God. Like Peter and Andrew and James and John; like Paul and his conversion experience on the road to Damascus.

A couple of weeks ago at the hugely successful Kids Against Hunger food packaging event there was a young family who had moved here from New Mexico to start the man’s studies at the seminary. He had left a prominent, responsible profession and the family was uprooted and his wife was beginning a new profession here because as he said, “When you hear the Call, you have to respond.”

Truth be told, I never had such an experience when I began to study to be a pastor. I just did it. And a month before graduation, Cathie and I received our first “Call” to Morgan City, LA. I wasn’t struck blind and knocked off my horse (although we did wonder about God’s choice of locations!) So, was it really a “Call,” a “commissioning begun with theophany?” I suppose the closest thing to that was when we were in Sadorus, and the synodical mess had pretty well done me in, and so I went to graduate school with the

idea of getting some credentials with the goal of leaving the pastoral ministry. I had become pretty jaundiced about most things ‘church,’ and my preaching showed it. One day while examining our vegetable gardens, one of the members called me by name and said, “We all know you’re hurting, but do you want to take us along with you?” That led me to a whole lot of soul-searching, talking with a couple of trusted people, praying with Cathie, of course, and then came to the conclusion: I really do want to be a pastor, and if that’s what God intends for me to do, then I need to do it with joy and conviction and diligence. Seven years after my ordination, that, I suppose, was really when I sensed the meaning of the “The Call” in my life.

II.

We talk here and throughout the Church about “called staff” and non-called staff. I suppose that’s OK, Yet it makes me wonder sometimes – Don’t you have a “call” to serve the Lord in special ways? Hasn’t God had his eye on you before you were born and singled you out and said, “That person is going to be my child, and that child is going to share the love of Jesus in a lot of different ways, and that love of Jesus is going to grow and multiply and impact lives and give peace and bestow hope to generation upon generation of people.” You see, that’s how it goes when people respond humbly to The Call, The Call to “Serve Christ and serve others.”

No matter what vocations we pursue and enjoy – and we all have several – we are CALLED by God to lives of ministry in the name of Jesus. Yea, and indeed, we are CALLED TO BE CHURCH.

That’s where the epistle lesson fits into this picture. For four weeks we have listened to the word of the Lord from 1 Corinthians 12 and 13, all of which focus on life as the church. Ditto, today’s reading. In context, the church then and there had become divided – over personalities, holy communion,

worship, and even spiritual gifts. This group had degenerated into a kind of ‘me-ism’ mindset. Whatever is good for me must be good for everyone else. Mind you, faith, is indeed, a personal experience. I can’t confess Christ Jesus as Savior and Lord for you and you can’t confess Christ Jesus as Savior and Lord for me. Jesus died for the sins of the world, of course; he is the Savior of all, but individually, one by precious one.

But Paul hastens to add that a growing faith is never in isolation from the rest of the faithful. I cannot be so preoccupied with my own spiritual needs and desires and faith that I neglect to use whatever gifts God has given to me to edify, build up, the rest of the church.

How do I do that? How do you? How do you respond to your Call to be Church, per Paul’s words here to the church?

A) **PRAY.** There is incredible power in praying for one another and in seeking prayer from others. What better antidote for any situation or need than to lay that at the feet of Jesus. Besides that, through prayer there is also a bond that exists between us. If a person has offended you or hurt you, pray for them, pray for patience, for reconciliation. If a person is in need of healing, or is battling an addiction or depression or loneliness or grief, if a person is struggling with work or is trying to find work, if a person’s family life or marriage is hanging on by a thread, lift up that person or family with your mind and your heart and your lips.

B) **WORSHIP.** This one hour each week that we come together as a household of the faithful is still the central focus of our life together; therefore it is no wonder that as we gather, we do so at the foot of the cross, the focus of our worship. Styles, forms, liturgies, hymns – each of us has our own preferences and prejudices. Paramount, however, is

to ask ourselves every time we walk through those doors, “Does what we do here give glory to God? Is what we do here Christ-centered? And, since our worship is a thankoffering, a response to God’s power and love toward each of us and all of us, is our worship the very best we have to give to the Lord of hosts?”

C) LEARNING AND TEACHING. As I have said many times, growth in faith and faithfulness doesn’t come by osmosis; rather, by a careful, prayerful study of the Word. From the youngest of children to the most ‘seasoned’ among us, we never outgrow the need to be into the Word. For that Word is God’s great gift to us, revealing to us the severity of His Law and the sweetness of His grace. That Word is God taking us by the hand and leading us into his will and way for our lives, day by day, all the way to heaven.

Are we worthy of being able to pray, to worship, to learn and teach the Word? Are we worthy of the Call to be Church?” No way; it’s all God’s idea.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.