

Order of Worship

Second Sunday after the Epiphany, January 17, 2021

WELCOME

PRELUDE *Präludium* A. Claussmann

CALL TO WORSHIP Psalm 139: 1-6, 13-18 UMH 854

HYMN 577 *God of Grace and God of Glory* CWM RHONDDA

SCRIPTURE John 1:43-51

PASTORAL PRAYER AND LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

HYMN 140 *Great Is Thy Faithfulness* FAITHFULNESS

SCRIPTURE 1 Samuel 3:1-10

MESSAGE Rev. Rebecca Voss

GENEROSITY, INVITATIONS and CELEBRATIONS

HYMN 593 *Here I Am, Lord* HERE I AM, LORD

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE *Voluntary in A Minor* J. Stanley

Prayer Corner

Lord, we lift up Vicki Nowaczyk's mother Esther into your loving arms. As she recovers from a fall that broke her hip and receives comfort care through hospice, help Esther experience your peace and hope as she awaits the time she sees you and her loved ones in heaven. Give Vicki and Ray's family your comfort as they spend time preparing, uniting, and grieving.

Our Great Physician, we pray for Jerry Evan's heart surgery rescheduled for next Wednesday. Completely heal, protect, strengthen, and guide him as he continues to love and serve you as our brother in our family of faith. Amen.

Have you ever felt “called”? People often assume that is only for those called to vocational ministry. Some people understandably raise an eyebrow and look for signs of schizophrenia, with the tell-tale symptom of hearing voices tell you what to do. Does a calling come from an audible yet ethereal voice? Does a calling always seem at least partly crazy? We long for a sense of purpose in life, so today we’ll start exploring how everyone – that includes you - is called.

This is “Part 1” of what it means to be called, and next week the Scriptures continue with more examples of people being called. Before we learn how God made each of us as uniquely gifted and called individuals next week, today we’ll focus on hearing and following our common calling as Christians.

These are just a few of many Scriptures that apply to all of us who want to be and do what we are created for. As I say these, listen to God’s voice calling to you.

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy. Proverbs 31:8-9

Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow. Isaiah 1:17

Act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God. Micah 6:8

Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Mark 16:15

He has saved us and called us to a holy life, not because of anything we have done, but because of his own purpose and grace. 2 Tim 1:1

‘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.’ Matt 22:37-39

Before we can accurately hear a specific calling for our lives, I believe God patiently watches to see if we’ll listen and follow our general calling. Imagine if we who consider ourselves believers lived out our general calling to defend the rights of the poor, work for justice for the oppressed, live with mercy and humility, joyfully share the source of our hope and faith with others, and live holy lives not

out of duty or fear, but out of grace and trust. Are any of us perfect in seizing every opportunity to fulfill our calling these ways? I've got a way to go, and suspect you might say the same about yourself.

In the Scripture readings for today we hear the stories of three people being called: Samuel, Philip, and Nathaniel. We'll look at Samuel's calling today, and save Philip and Nathaniel for next week.

1 Samuel 3 begins, "*Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.*" Later, in verse 7, it says, "*Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.*" Somehow young Samuel was "ministering to the Lord" without even yet "knowing the Lord". Likewise, it is still common to see people come to worship and even serve in church, but not yet have a close relationship with the Lord.

I've been there. I was raised in church at least once a week for worship and Sunday school, sang in the children's and then the adult choir, played oboe in various worship ensembles, played in the handbell choir, was president of the youth group, and even served on the call committee to search for a new senior pastor. I certainly knew about God, but I didn't know God personally.

It wasn't until I went to college that I heard for the first time that I could have a real and living relationship with Christ. The Word of God – Scripture fulfilled in Jesus – suddenly went from black and white to full-spectrum color. In a non-audible way, I heard Jesus' voice woo me to "come and see" as well as "come and follow". I was being awakened to the profound depth of our common calling that centers on truly knowing, serving, and loving God and others.

Let's look closer at the story of Samuel for how we can begin to hear God's general calling. "*Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'"*" (1 Sam. 3:9). Here is an interpretive application: it is difficult to hear God's calling if our souls are restless. We get distracted and can't "hear" God's call when there is too much busy-ness or noise in our lives. My personal experience is that God's call gets muffled until I'm intentional about being quiet and restful for my body and soul. Often that literally means lying, sitting, or kneeling down in silence and rest as I trust in God's presence and promise.

Last week in the message about Jesus' baptism I explained how baptism is a sacrament that visibly shows us how God initiates a relationship with us. John Wesley used the words "prevenient grace" to describe how God ignites the pilot light in our souls. A pilot light is necessary, but it won't heat a room or cook a meal. It is the means to provide a way for much bigger flames with the heat necessary to warm and feed people. Likewise, prevenient grace is given to provide the opportunity for us to come, see, and truly know Christ and accept God's gift of salvation.

When we respond to Christ's invitation to come and know God, our relationship with God isn't because of our goodness. It is only Christ's perfection and grace that justifies us. Wesley called this facet of grace, "justifying grace". It allows us to be lined up with God's general calling, just like a word processing app on our computer lines up the words we write to be "justified" on the left, center, or right side of the paper.

Samuel's "pilot light" was on as he served God before he heard God's call. He knew about God, but he didn't yet have the fire of divine love burning in his heart for God and others. That all changed when he followed Eli's instructions, waited patiently for God to speak, "*Samuel, Samuel!*", and replied to God's call with "*Speak, for your servant is listening.*" (1 Samuel 3:10).

The Word of God, Christ himself, is calling you to align your life with God's call to all who know the Lord. Some of that call comes more easily based on our personality, and other parts of that general call will stretch us. In everything, God's grace is sufficient, and his power is made perfect even in our weaknesses (2 Corinthians 12:9). I invite you to read and reflect more on God's general but often challenging call. Acknowledge the parts that feel daunting and ask God to give you grace and connections to grow together into all areas of our common call.

God is calling your name and inviting you to know and love Christ more than you already do. The Lord is nudging you to actively love, defend, and help those who are overlooked and undervalued in this world. The Holy Spirit is calling and empowering you to know and share God's love and grace in both spoken and unspoken ways. May our hearts blaze and lives echo the song (UMH 577), "Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, serving Thee whom we adore." Amen.