

FIRST LESSON: Isaiah 6:1-8
SECOND LESSON: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11
THE GOSPEL: Luke 5:1-11

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany
February 10, 2019

“Clarity in God’s Call”
Sermon Preached by Pastor Lowell D. Nelson
American Lutheran Church of Sun City

Grace and peace be to you through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

God’s call sometimes brings up feelings of discomfort. I tried to think of a time when I have been called upon, I was discomforted, and it reminded me of school. I did not do well in geometry. I have other aptitudes, that wasn’t it. I remember there would be a postulate or a theorem or something I was supposed to know, the coach knew that, coach Cornwall, he would ask me what the answer was, and I would always have the feeling in the pit of my stomach being called on. Does anybody else remember that? In fact, once in a while I will even have a dream now, unprepared for some big assignment. I want to give thanks to coach Cornwall for recognizing that if I didn’t pass I wouldn’t be able to play football. I got a mercy D, I think.

I also want you to think of God’s call as something as a positive. God’s call is not just simply a test, it’s a positive thing. I was thinking back to days in West Point, Nebraska, and playing with my friends. It’s getting to dusk and we had rules about when we were supposed to get home, but those pick up baseball games were always so much fun, or playing shoot and hoops with the kids, so we would stay. Street lights might come on and we would try to eek out a little bit more until you could hear your mother calling. I don’t know if you have ever had that experience. I could hear mom, I was maybe a quarter mile away, usually playing stuff. You could hear “Lowelllll.” And then my friends would say, “busted.” When I think about it, what was she inviting me back to? A great meal, warmth, the love of family. That’s part of what I want to help you understand, that God’s call, yes it might have some of the challenges of disrupting life, but it is ultimately a call back home.

I want to use the scripture now to encourage you, I made a little bit light of that third chapter, or that we are rounding third base, but we at this age, most of us over the age of 60, are in a unique position as God calls us home, we are not afraid of that call, but of course we hope it is many years from now, and we have life to live. But we as people of faith have an opportunity to help people, particularly younger people in their sense of call and encouragement because there is a universal distress that comes with the call of God. It is in the First Lesson as the death of a king and Isaiah then with the living king and the vision that he had and said this, “Woe is me, I am lost for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips,

and yet I have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts.” His call was to speak, so he was speaking of the words that he feels were unholy so the purification, the imagery there, is a pair of tongs with live coal. This imagery of cleansing and the sin has now departed is a way to understand that when God calls we all have a history, we all have those types of things that diminish our sense, could God actually use me? That is a universal fear, whom shall I send? When you realize that it’s God’s power, not your own, but God’s power. God’s power to forgive, no longer not good enough, but called forward towards a mission. The clarity of God’s call and then the response, “Here I am, send me.” I love that.

Paul continues that *Here I am*, as the challenges that we have with the legacy of life and the mistakes we have made. Paul said it in his call, here he is speaking of clarity of the love of God through Jesus Christ and the power of resurrection. Then he has the phrase, “But I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle.” The Latin word missionary, impossible missionary, because I persecuted the Church of God. He had a history. He actually did this, but then he has this beautiful phrase, “But by the grace of God, I am what I am.” At seminary that was called the Popeye phrase – I am what I am. Forget that – that has not worked. I might use it in the third service, Gary, but maybe not. “I am what I am,” and this beautiful phrase “and his grace towards me has not been in vain.” We are what we are. There can be epiphanies and challenges in life that allow us to flourish and grow forward, but Paul’s personality was just redirected, right? Tenacious, an advocate, there wasn’t any change, just repurposing. I wanted to remind you that this call is not just for us who are called to be pastors. Luther set that way aside, he called it the priesthood of all believers. We all have a call to serve and to love.

I was given a ring by a pastor friend when I became a pastor, so I wear it. It’s from the Micah 6:8 text that we just sang about, to *seek justice and love and mercy and be humble before the Lord*. It’s right here to remind me, she was concerned I wouldn’t remember it, she wanted it right there. It is helpful. But it is something, it’s not just for the special. Luther totally rejected the idea that the priests and nuns were closer to God. Each one of us has a mission to bring God’s love and hope and healing to this world. So he was attributed with the phrase, he didn’t want a Christian cobbler that put a little cross on the shoe, he wanted somebody who good make good shoes, right? That was to the honor of God. All that we have done in our life has been the opportunity to share. We are what we are, but by the Grace of God, this grace has not been in vain.

In the Gospel text itself, isn’t it cool how Jesus sees an opportunity to reach more people, so with the natural amphitheater of the lakeshore there, Gennesaret was a beautiful, very fertile area there, almost like the Garden of Eden, in the imagery. It’s on the west side of Lake Galilee. Moving out, he was able to speak to more people and then he redirects Simon to go out and to fish. This phrase of Peter as he sees the remarkable nature of creation, “Go away from me Lord for I am a sinful man.” Anyone who has a touch of the Holy, when you see

something out of the ordinary, when you have a sense in your dream or a life experience where you read the scriptures, or you understand the love of another person in your life that opens you up to something beyond the normal, beyond the secular. There is that normal response, I am not good enough. Jesus comes to him, “Do not be afraid.” That’s my encouragement to you, and for myself, that’s the sense of call. If you don’t have a sense of call in your life, then I ask you to do something. Psalm 138 had it this way, “*When I called you, you answered me. You increase my strength within me.*” And it continues in verse 8, “*The Lord will make good his purpose for me. Oh Lord your love endures forever. Do not abandon the works of your hands.*” So if you are called, you are part of the priesthood of all believers and need to be renewed. That is a beautiful prayer. “God, I call upon you to provide clarity in my life.”

I know one thing that we here at this congregation can do, is to be an encouragement center. I am so thankful for the trust and the work of the trust. Well over \$6,000 was sent to Luther Seminary and to Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary to support them in their mission. People of all ages contributed to the call of God to preach and to teach, and to bring service in the name of Christ. We continue this encouragement. The trust also funds over at Pan De Vida scholarships for young people that are attending school. It’s fun to meet them and to see them at the beginning of their life. You and I can be people of encouragement.

A couple more points on this. Last week I made a comment. I want to make sure I attribute it very clearly to Robert Madu. He said it this way, “Comparison will consistently cloud the clarity of God’s call in your life.” It is so deeply personal. There is no need to compare it to another person, it’s the priesthood of all believers. So as we are called, we are called in this beautiful way. I have heard this phrase, but can’t attribute it to who said it. “God does not call to qualify, God qualifies the call.” By definition, if you are called to do something that’s outside the ordinary, it will need God’s help. It is beyond our measure. That creates fear. If you are part of this fear cycle, which we can all be, then I ask you to hang in there, it’s just part of the process of the call. Do not be afraid, move forward in faith.

I want to end with a little acronym we use back in Nebraska. We were getting frustrated, it’s amazing to me, I can’t believe it, it just still stuns me. Young pastors, their first call idea is often not going to Nebraska. We have 250 congregations back there, and we were short 82 pastors. So we were getting frustrated because we knew it was a good place. We were also getting frustrated that the Huskers would go out and try to recruit good people. We said, “Why don’t we go out and recruit?” We had something called *Project Idea*. **I** means to invite people to consider to be ministers and to work within the church and to share their life. It started expanding, it wasn’t just pastors, it started expanding because we started realizing the call was for people to be part of the priesthood of all believers. But to go ahead and invite. I encourage you in your life if you see some person in your life that has the capability to minister in the priesthood of all believers, that is so wide and so large, that can be from anything –

someone considering medical school, considering global mission, considering being a pastor, to consider being a nurse. It's all out there, but we can invite people to consider this.

D means to discern, to take time. The sermon comes in two ways, internal – it is very private and holy work that God works in your heart, the internal call. But it's also a sense of community, to help people and to encourage them, and to pray for them in this time of seeking God's clarity.

Then **E** means to get excited. Too often I find that we get to the first parts but it is just difficult, there will be changes in life, there will be changes in life that are scary, often. So how do we excite about this is actually from the Lord? Then the last, **A** is to act. Idea = invite, discern, excite, act. I love it.

There are a lot of people that join ministry. I was getting a little teared up there. It works this way. My father had surgery, he got through the surgery for his broken hip, but is struggling in his recovery. I am going up there in a couple weeks. Pastor Gary will lead worship. I want to be with him. I was getting things ready at the church where he will have his funeral someday. The person there, it was a vicar, I didn't know she was, but Vicar Sherry, she goes, "When you start a project IDEA, I was one of those people you talked to, you invited me into ministry." My first instinct was I'm getting old enough now that now I have these young people coming up. Here I am, wow. She's going to lead the services for my dad's funeral someday. That encouragement, I just see how God brings us forward.

So I wanted to end with this. Make it deeply personal for your own life. Ask for God's clarity upon your own call. When I call you, you will answer. That may come in the form of scripture, it may come in the form of friends, it may come in the sense of your intuition, it may come in many ways. God will answer your call and he will make good his purpose for you. Certainly, we as a congregation, and we as fellow members of Christ, can encourage the younger generations to consider their life in Christ. It is an amazing thing, God's call brings clarity. This is the priesthood in which we all belong. Praise be to God. Amen