

Called

A Sermon Preached by Anne Keener
First Presbyterian Church, Franklin, Tennessee
January 15, 2017
2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A)
1 Corinthians 1:1-9



In *My Utmost for His Highest*, Oswald Chambers wrote “The call of God is not just for a select few but for everyone. Whether I hear God’s call or not depends on the condition of my ears, and exactly what I hear depends upon my spiritual attitude.”¹

The word call and called are scattered throughout today’s passage. Paul identified himself first as someone who was called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.

I think we can get caught up with the language of called. Some might reserve the use of the phrase being called to mean your vocation is in the church, but being called is much deeper and at the same time much simpler. God calls all of us into God’s family through the grace given to us in Jesus Christ. In the act of receiving the grace God has freely given us, our hearts are then called to find ways to respond to that grace in a wide variety of ways.

I feel called to serve here in my role as Pastoral Assistant just like I felt called to serve as a Stephen Leader, as an Elder, as a youth leader both here and while in college, and as a member of the Student Leadership Team while in high school.

I have been called to mission work both as a youth and as an adult. Mission work that involved crossing state lines and mission work within the walls of this church. And it is certainly only by God’s calling that I wore an orange jumpsuit during the 2010 Galactic Blast Vacation Bible School which resulted in being affectionately called Commander Keener for years.

¹ Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*

As Chambers said, being called is not just for a select few but for everyone. We are all called by God to serve in our own unique way. I have heard people struggle with determining exactly what God is calling them to do, and I understand. It isn't always clear, and I have been known to ask God for clarity. Sometimes we know immediately when God is calling us, sometimes we must wait for what seems like a long time, and then sometimes God is the one waiting for us to recognize the call.

Well-known author and speaker Parker Palmer wrote, "Before I can tell my life what I want to do with it, I must listen to my life telling me who I am."² Listen to my life telling me who I am. This one statement might turn things upside down for some. How many of us catch ourselves making life decisions on our own instead of listening for our life in Christ to direct our path?

Paul starts the heart of his letter with thanks and praise, which is a wonderful place to start any letter or prayer, but did you catch that his gratitude isn't directed at what the people of Corinth have done but at what God has done? Paul gives thanks always to God for the church because of the grace that God has given them. It all starts with God not with us which is cause for much thanksgiving.

Paul starts with thanks and moves right into abundance. The message of abundance, just like the letter as a whole, is directed to the community not individuals. He says in every way the community has been enriched in Christ so that they are not lacking in any spiritual gifts. In the later chapters of this letter, Paul will address many of the troubling things he has heard about the community, but he is laying the foundation of abundance. Gratitude and abundance go hand in hand. When we choose to see our world, our families, our work, our joys, our sorrows, all from a place of abundance, everything changes. We see things differently.

When we start to see things from a place of abundance, we start to believe that with God, all things are possible. When we start to see things from a place of abundance, our Session can take a leap of faith and decide to have a capital campaign when others might have questioned the timing. A capital campaign that raised double the pledges of our initial goal. A capital campaign that quickly

² Parker Palmer, *Studying your Uniqueness to Discover Your Calling*

became about much more than money. A campaign where we experienced God at work in our congregation.

When we start to see things from a place of abundance, our mission committee can create monthly Second Saturday hands on mission opportunities and give all ages tangible ways to be the hands and feet of Christ in our community.

When we start to see things from a place of abundance, we find a new way to envision a small group ministry and create Growth Groups that have provided space for well over 100 members to deepen connections with each other and with God.

In his book *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer says Christian community “is not an ideal which we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate.”³

Christian community isn’t an ideal to be realized, but a reality already created by God in Christ in which we participate together. Being a Christian community doesn’t mean we are striving to be perfect or ideal. It means we are striving for union with God through the reality that God already created. God is the source of life together, of community.

The Corinth community wasn’t perfect just as our community of faith isn’t perfect nor will it ever be. Instead, we are an imperfect people living in an imperfect world called to respond to God’s grace together, as a community.

As this letter was written to the whole community, not to individuals, Paul is telling the community that they are not lacking in any spiritual gifts. Like the community in Corinth, we have all we need, but we need our whole community. Spiritual gifts are just that, gifts from God and should be viewed as such. Some of the people of Corinth were viewing themselves better than others because they had certain spiritual gifts instead of recognizing and praising God as the source of their gifts.

³Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*

I can imagine the people of Corinth had a wide variety of gifts just as our community of faith is blessed by people with diverse gifts. This is what makes a community stronger than the individuals. Our congregation responds to God's grace through numerous ministries that require a variety of gifts, all of which are equally important.

We need people who are called to travel to Lesvos or West Virginia like we need people who are called to serve through Second Saturdays and Room In The Inn.

We need people who say yes to being Stephen Ministers and people who say yes to having a Christian friend walk with them through a difficult time because yes, receiving is also a gift.

We need people who bring new energy and ideas to existing ministries and those who help envision and create new ministries such as a visitation ministry.

We need people to greet those around them each Sunday and people to serve on a hospitality team.

We need people who share their voices in the choir and those who joyfully sing in the pews.

In order to be the body of Christ that God intends, we need everyone to do their part, to answer their call.

Your calling may not be the same as the person next to you and that is a good thing. Be authentic, find what God is calling you to do, but let me be clear, being authentic doesn't mean God will always keep you safely within your comfort zone. If that were the case, I most certainly would not be standing up here today. God calls all of us in our own way, but we must have ears to listen. In the midst of our often loud and busy world do you create space to listen for the voice other than your own?

Maybe you need to turn the volume down on your own voice, your own fears, your own insecurities and listen for that still small voice. Listen to where God is calling you. It is different for each person so do not compare how God is calling you. Comparison kills joy. Just be still, listen, and then respond with gratitude from a place of abundance.

We are all called. This letter is not just to the church in Corinth, not just to a certain small group, not just to those that work at church, not just to those who travel across an ocean to do mission work, not just to those who _____. You fill in the blank with whatever it is going through your mind right now and possibly preventing you from answering the call, preventing you from following Christ who passed through the same waters of baptism and walks ahead of us now, dripping wet.

All are called into the fellowship of God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. All are called, and God, from a place of abundance, is the one initiating. God is calling us to participate in the community, calling us to respond to the grace given to us. How is God calling you? How is God calling us, as a community of faith?

These words from Parker Palmer have stayed with me all week, and I hope they will stay with you. "Our deepest calling is to grow into our authentic selfhood, whether or not it conforms to some image of who we ought to be. As we do so, we will not only find the joy that every human being seeks- we will also find our path of authentic service in the world."⁴

Remember, you are called and may you also find your calling, your path of authentic service in the world. Amen.

⁴ Parker Palmer, *Becoming the Person You Called to Become (Not What the World Wants of You)*