

The Call of God

1Corinthians 1:26-31

The Baptism of Our Lord, January 7, 2018

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

When God called Noah, He delivered to Noah the warning about the flood and the command to build an ark. When God called Abraham, He delivered His promises of descendents, the land, and a blessing to all of the nations of the earth to Abraham. When God called Moses God spoke to Moses from the flames of fire in a bush. When God called Samuel, God delivered His Word to Samuel.

When God called Saul to be king over Israel God delivered His word that Saul would be king through His prophet Samuel. When God called David to be king over Israel in Saul's place God delivered the message that David would be king by sending the prophet Samuel to David's family to deliver God's message.

When God called the prophets, He delivered His word to them. He did it directly by revelation. He did it by visions.

When God called the apostles, God went down to the Sea of Galilee and saw them mending their nets because they were fisherman. God called them and told them that they would be fishers of men. When God called Paul, God appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus. When God called pastors on the island of Crete God sent Paul to send Titus to appoint pastors on the island of Crete. God commanded Paul to command Timothy to take the trustworthy word of God as he had learned it and deliver it into the hands of trustworthy men who would be competent enough to teach others.

Sometimes when God calls people He delivers His word of calling to them directly. He appears in a vision or a dream or in some miraculous fashion. Sometimes when God calls, He delivers His word of calling through someone authorized to speak on His behalf. But whether called directly or called through someone else the people that I have just mentioned were all called by God to their various callings.

Thus when God calls someone He delivers His word to that person when He calls them. Not only does He deliver a word to them about their calling, but He also delivers whatever other words that He desires to deliver to that person.

With that understanding in mind, let us also consider the calling that God has laid upon all of you. Here I am not talking about the sacred vocations of father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker. As sacred as those vocations are there is another calling about which the Scriptures speak. It is the call of God to believe in Him. It is the call of God to repentance and faith. It is the call of God to come to Him.

While it was possible that such a calling could have come to you directly from God Himself by a miraculous revelation of Himself, that kind of calling seems to be reserved for people who are apostles and prophets. Not even I received my call to be a pastor by a miraculous revelation of God. I received my call to be a pastor from those people whom God authorized to speak on His behalf in such matters. In the same way you received your calling to be His sons through people authorized to speak on His behalf. And when you received your calling, God gave it to you together with the report that makes such a calling effective.

The report about which I am speaking is the Word of Christ. It is the Gospel. When God called you He delivered to you His message. His message is about Christ. We call it the Gospel. The Gospel can be summarized neatly by the Apostles' or Nicene Creeds. I would call your attention to the Nicene Creed

where it stands written that “for us men and for our salvation, He came down from heaven.” The Apostles’ Creed assumes that but does not mention it. Everything that Jesus did He did for you. He gave His life for you in atonement for your sin. He rose from the dead for you in victory over your death. But if those two things are for you then everything else that He did, He did for you. He performed His miracles for you. He overthrew the devil for you. And today it is important for me to point out, that He was baptized for you.

In His Baptism Jesus from Nazareth received His calling to be the Savior of the world. The voice declares Jesus to be the Son of God. The Son of God was the traditional name in the Old Testament for the divinely called king of Israel, the descendents of David. In His Baptism Jesus receives His calling to reign over Israel forever.

Furthermore the voice says that He is well pleased with Jesus. When the voice says that He is well pleased with Jesus the voice is repeating what He prophesied through Isaiah that a servant of the Lord would come forth with whom the Lord would be well pleased. This servant would have no beauty or form to attract us to Him. He would be a man familiar with sorrows and acquainted with grief. We would consider Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. We like sheep have gone astray and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him and by His wounds we are healed. Jesus from Nazareth receives His calling to be our Savior when He is baptized. The Lord informs Him of such calling.

This is the fullness of the Gospel. The Gospel is the message about Jesus from God to you. The Gospel therefore is the report that God delivered to you when He called you to faith. The report itself gave you faith.

Now when God delivers His calling He does not usually deliver the report all at once. With some people God delivers an extended exposition of His Gospel when He calls them to faith. Take Cornelius for example. God called Cornelius and his household to faith when God sent Peter to preach the Gospel. When Peter arrived in the home of Cornelius Peter delivered to him an extended exposition and explanation of the Gospel. It gave Cornelius and his family the Holy Spirit and faith. The same thing happened in Pisidian Antioch when Paul got up to preach in the synagogue. Paul gave an extended exposition of the Gospel beginning with the Old Testament and continuing into the New in order to give them a full explanation of what God had done for them in Christ Jesus. When God delivered that report to the people of Pisidian Antioch, He gave many of them faith.

But sometimes the report is short. In Philippi Paul and Silas are jailed. In jail they sing hymns. One night there is an earthquake and the jail doors are opened. The jailor comes into the jail and sees the doors opened. Assuming that his prisoners have escaped and knowing that his superiors will have him put to death for letting them escape, he draws his sword to kill himself. None of the prisoners had escaped and when the jailor draws his sword Paul calls out to him to stop. Paul explains that every prisoner is there. No one is going to kill the jailor tonight. When the jailor asks Paul, “What must I do to be saved?” Paul does not preach an extended sermon. He simply gives a straightforward answer to a straightforward question. He says, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and your household.” That was not all of the Gospel. That was not even the main points of the Gospel. But it was enough for the jailor to bring him to faith. Later on Paul instructed him and his household about Jesus and baptized all of them.

So when God called you for some of you it was elaborate. There was a whole chain of unusual incidences that brought the Gospel into your life. When you look back on it you can see the will and hand of God at work in it. For some of the rest of you, you were simply blessed to be born into a Christian

household. Your parents had you baptized and you received the full instruction in the Gospel later on. For some of you that baptism was sufficient for your call to faith. For others of you, some other simple statement of the Gospel served sufficiently for your call. For others of you, God sent you a long explanation of the Gospel over a period of time in order to bring you to faith. God sends whatever it is that you need in order to call you to faith. The one thing about which He is consistent is that when He calls you to faith, He always calls you to faith with some part of the Gospel if not all of it. The report of the Gospel gives you faith. Since Holy Baptism is one such part of the Gospel it is sufficient to call you to faith even as, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and your household," was sufficient for the Philippian jailor.

Now, consider your calling, brothers. Consider the time when God called you. Consider the time when God first brought you the Gospel. What was your situation?

When God called you, were you wise by the standards of the flesh? When God called you, were you powerful in any way? When God called you were you of noble birth? And don't be fooled by that question because we are Americans and do not have designated kings or nobles. Even we Americans have people who are of noble birth. Some people even in America have advantages over others simply because of the family into which they were born. I know even of churchly organizations who will favor some people because of their last name rather than because of their accomplishments. So make no mistake even without a royal family or noblemen, the United States of America has those who are of noble birth. Now I ask you, at the time of your calling, were you of noble birth?

For a few of us the answer will be yes. Some of us were wise by the standards of the flesh when God brought the Gospel to us. Some of us were powerful when God brought the Gospel to us. Some of us were of noble birth when God brought the Gospel to us. But not all of us were and certainly the majority of us were not!

Baptism is a sufficient part of the Gospel to call someone to faith. Most of you were baptized when you were infants. You therefore received your calling when you were infants. Were you wise? Were you powerful? You might have been of noble birth, but not all of us were, and I would contend that not even most of us were. And even outside of our congregation there are lowly and despised people in our society whom God called to faith through Baptism or through some other means because it pleased Him to do so.

He does so in order to shame the wise and in order to shame the strong. He calls the lowly and the despised and people who amount to nothing in order to shame those who are something, even though they are not, but they only think that they are.

When God calls despised and lowly people to faith He is doing more than simply identifying with them. He is condemning the high born. When God is born in Bethlehem and wrapped in swaddling cloths and laid in a manger, He is doing more than simply identifying with the poor. He is condemning wealth. He is God and He does not choose those things. If He does not choose those things why would the sons of God choose them?

I remember when I first went on my strict lo-cholesterol diet. When it became known to people that I changed by eating habits, there was negative reaction both from within the congregation and from within my own family! Both those who belong to the congregation and those who are blood related to me told me, "Take the pill and eat what you want!" And what surprised me was not that they told me to do that. What surprised me was the anger with which many people said it. I felt as if some of you thought that I was condemning you for your eating habits simply by changing mine.

I know of couples who keep chastity before marriage and have endured the scorn of friends for doing so! Here they are keeping chastity and their friends condemn them for keeping the will of God. And why do the friends condemn them for keeping chastity? Because their friends are committing fornication and want to continue to commit fornication and when they keep chastity their friends realize that such people who keep chastity condemn them for their fornication, but rather than repent of their fornication they condemn and despise those would keep chastity and do righteousness.

Now if human choices like these are enough to convey condemnation, then surely the choices of God convey condemnation. God who could have chosen any birth chose to be born of poor people in Bethlehem and instead of a crib laid in a manger. God who could have chosen any life of righteous heroism chooses to go to the Jordan River and identify with sinners by being baptized like He is one of them.

In these choices God condemns our lust for power, wealth, intellect. And He further condemns such things when chooses to call infants to Himself, when He chooses to baptize them. He condemns our trust in our accomplishments and righteousness. He condemns us when we think that we are something by choosing those who are nothing.

And what is the purpose of such condemnation? Why would God condemn anything or anyone that sets itself up as something or someone? The reason is simple: to bring about the saying that is written, "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord."

If one thinks that he is someone when he is nothing, his boasting is in himself and not in the Lord. Even so once God brings to nothing the things that are, preferring to choose instead the things that are not, He leaves us with no one in which to boast except Him.

When all of the earthly, worldly glory, pomp, wealth, intellect, and power are condemned and God starts calling infants to faith, then even if we were baptized as adults or received our calling as adults in some other way, He leaves with no one in which to boast except Him.

To Him alone be glory and not as a mere sentiment which it would be without the Lord's condemnation, but honestly so.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.