

Sermon for Zion Presbyterian Church, September 9, 2018

Hymns: 370 - Hallelujah! Sing to Jesus; 694 - This is my commandment;

637 - Take my life and let it be; 626 - Lord of all power

Scripture: Romans 1:1-8; John 15:9-17

Sermon Title: God calls your name

Romans 1:1-8 (NIV)

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God - the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake. And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

*To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people:
Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.*

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world.

John 15:9-17 (NIV)

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other.

Adam and Eve are walking in the garden, charmed by the fragrant flowers, cooled by the evening breeze. “Adam,” says a voice. “Eve.” It is the Lord.

Noah is at home, looking out the kitchen window, the shutters banging in a sudden breeze, wondering why on earth animals are beginning to hang around the

house, two by two. He's about to mention this to Mrs. Noah, when he hears it. "Noah," it says. It is the Lord.

Abraham stands squinting in the sun, looking from the crest of a hill over his herdsmen and flocks scattered below, the bleating of the sheep a distant chorus, when, carried on the wind, it seems, a sound – no, now a sound, a voice distinct from all the rest. "Abraham," it whispers. It is the Lord.

Jacob, exhausted, can't travel a step further. He has run and ridden as far as his own legs and those of his camel can take him, but he's afraid it isn't far enough, that his brother is on his trail with blood in his eye, and if he catches up, it's all over, but he can't go another inch, he's finished, is Jacob, and with a rock for a pillow he closes his eyes and wonders if ever he'll open them again, his only lullaby the desert wind, shifting countless grains of sand, and from up out of the sand, from down out of the sky, from all around, comes a voice. "Jacob," it says. It is the Lord.

Moses hauls himself up the side of the mountain, coming closer to the strange light which had caught his eye, a light like a fire, but there's no smoke, no crackle, and one more heave over one last ledge, and he's there, and before him stands a bush, and it is as though the bush is aflame, yet the strange fire does not consume it, not even the leaves, and there's a sound like a distant wind, and the sound becomes a voice, and the voice says his name. "Moses," it says, and again: "Moses." It is the Lord.

And so God speaks. And so God calls. Again and again, God speaks, God calls. And always with a name: Adam. Eve. Noah. Abram. Jacob. Moses. The names could go on, a list that would take us deep into the afternoon: Miriam, Joshua, Gideon, Deborah, Hannah, Samuel, David, Elijah – and more, and more. Name after name, man and woman, young, old, rich, poor, so God speaks, so God calls.

And with the names, a mission, a task, a command: Come out! Build an ark! Journey to Canaan! Journey to Egypt! Go see the Pharaoh! When God calls, there's something afoot, something big coming, something to be done. And those whom God calls, do it. They have their questions, they have their fears, some even try to talk God out of it, but somehow, somehow, God calls, and they listen. And they follow. And they do the work of the Lord.

The calls continue throughout the Old Testament, and keep sounding in the New. “Mary,” says the Voice. “Do not be afraid. You will bear a child, and his name will be Jesus.” “Joseph,” says the Voice. “Do not be afraid. Take Mary as your wife.” And with this, God speaks Jesus into being, and for the first time, when God speaks, someone will answer, “Yes, Father?” And so the Voice comes again, this time to the startled ears of John the Baptist, as he lifts Jesus from the river from which he has emerged, baptized. “This is my beloved Son,” it thunders, “in whom I am well pleased.” And from then on, it is Jesus, the beloved Son, who will do the calling.

“Come,” says the voice of Jesus, carrying across the water, catching even Peter’s ear as he hauls the net from the sea, “and I will make you fishers of men.” “Come, join us too,” Jesus calls, as James and John leave their baffled father behind. “You too,” he says to the hated tax collector Matthew, much to Peter’s unhappy surprise. Time and again, Jesus calls. Time and again, people follow. Mary. Martha. Mary Magdalene. Thomas. Judas. Nathaniel. “Come! Follow!” Name after name, man and woman, young, old, rich, poor, so Jesus speaks, so Jesus calls.

He calls the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, the sick to be well, the paralysed to pick up their stretcher and dance. He calls the sinner to repent, the lost to be found, the self-righteous to be humble, the rich to be generous, the poor to rejoice, for the Kingdom, he says, is theirs.

One little girl he calls back from a place far, far away. “Talitha, koum,” he says, “little girl, sit up,” and the tear filled eyes of the grieving parents are wide with disbelieving joy as their little girl, their little lamb, the apple of their eye, sits up from her death bed, the shroud falling from her face, her eyes locking on those of Jesus, on the face she can’t help thinking she has seen somewhere before.

He calls his friend from a place farther still. Four days, the friend has been dead, gone; four days, his soul has travelled from the land of the living, four days has the stone sealed shut his tomb. “Lazarus!” calls Jesus, “Come out!” And with that Voice, his soul and body are again made one, and the crowd gives a shout as Lazarus stumbles from his tomb. God, it seems, had a purpose for Lazarus. As God had a purpose for them all, and so, like with Noah, Abraham, Moses and the rest; and so, God called their name.

Whenever Paul closed his eyes, he could hear just that; the voice of God, calling his name, with a rumble and a boom like the end of the world, with a power

that knocked him off his horse and a glory that robbed the sight from his eyes. From that moment on, whenever putting quill to parchment, Paul would begin his letters identifying himself as “one who has been called.” And in calling Paul’s name, God turned Paul’s path from one direction right to the other, from enemy to friend, from stranger to servant. For to be called is to be given a mission, a task, a command. To be called is to be given a purpose. To be called means you, your life, your breath, your minutes and days, your weaknesses and strengths, your poverty and your riches, now have meaning beyond your dreams. For your name has been called by the King.

And your name, too, has been called. Your name, too, has been spoken by God. You have been called, as Paul said in our reading from Romans, “to belong to Jesus Christ.” Called by whom? By Jesus. “You have not chosen me,” said Jesus, “but I have chosen you.” Jesus has called your name. You too, no less than Noah, Abraham, Miriam, Hannah; you too, no less than Mary, Joseph, Peter, Martha; you too have been called. So be assured: No less than these others, God has a place, a task, a role, a purpose for you. What might it be?

I can tell you right now, you are not called to nothing. You are called to something! Only once in all the Bible does God’s call mean, “do nothing,” and that was when Jesus told the disciples to wait. It happened after the Resurrection, and before Jesus ascended to heaven (Acts 1:4-5 NIV):

On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

Strangely, of all the commands God gives in the Bible, of all the instructions and encouragements Jesus shares, this is the one we’ve really taken to heart. It seems like we’re still waiting. It seems like we missed what happened next: the disciples after waiting a few days, were suddenly blessed with the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and from that point on, it was “go go go,” on to the work to which they had been called. The waiting was over. It was time to act. Which is, after all, where the “Book of Acts” got its name. It isn’t called the “Book of waiting around and waiting for the other guy to do something.” It is “The Book of Acts,” to book of those whose name God has called.

So what does God call us to do? Well, back to the call of Jesus upon us. Listen again: *“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. This is my command: Love each other.”*

We are called – we are chosen – to bear fruit, which simply means to produce results. And we are called to love one another, which is the guideline by which we make that happen. And to love one another in this context doesn't mean developing sticky feelings for the fellow in the pew in front of you. It means serving that person, working together with that person, joining in with this family to make a difference in the lives of each one here, and in the lives of those outside these doors, in the name of the one who calls us, Jesus Christ.

There are so many ways we can love God and love one another, so many ways we can bear fruit, so many ways we can make a difference. What opportunities are there? Well, one of the tasks of the church is to provide opportunities for service. It is up to each one of us to stop waiting, and to step forward to take advantage of those opportunities, to begin in ways big and ways small to respond to the call of God on our lives.

We can start by serving the very youngest among us, and step forward to teach or help in our Sunday School, to help convey in time and word and deed to the children of our church that they are a priority in our church family, that God loves them, that God's love for them will never stop. You can be that person. You can stop waiting. You can step forward.

Our Missions Committee is involved in the exciting work of congregational outreach. Food Grains Bank, Camp Keir, and our Food Bank and Soup Kitchen are but three of the life-changing, difference-making organisations we support. We seek always to creatively present to the congregation the many challenges God puts before us. To do that in an ongoing, dynamic way, we need the help of people whose names have been called by God. You can be that person. You can stop waiting. You can step forward.

Our Pastoral Care network seeks provide better and better contact with our entire church family, to be aware of needs when they arise, to respond in caring ways to those who need a word of encouragement. We particularly want to ensure that our seniors and shut-in folk receive visits and encouragement, a visit to brighten their day. We need the help of people whose name has been called by God. You can be that person. You can stop waiting. You can step forward.

There are countless ways to serve, both great and small; from greeting at the door to setting up the coffee, from helping fix a broken hinge to giving someone a ride to church; from singing in the choir to counting the offering; if we are to be a place where the people called by God gather in worship, praise and service, we need to stop waiting, we need to step forward, we need to be that person.

We respond to God's call with our time, with our talents, with our resources. Even as there are many ways to share of our time and our talents, there are many opportunities to make our resources count for God, in ways that will outlive us all, as we contribute to the work and service of the Lord. For the Lord has called us by name.

Noah, Abraham, Moses, Miriam. Mary, Joseph, Peter, Martha. Roger, Evelyn, Bob, Dianne. In calling your name, God turned your path from one direction right to the other, from enemy to friend, from stranger to servant. For to be called is to be given a mission, a task, a command. To be called is to be given a purpose. To be called means you, your life, your breath, your minutes and days, your weaknesses and strengths, your poverty and your riches, now have meaning beyond your dreams. For your name has been called by the King.

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other.

God has called you by name. Will you answer? Amen.