

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

1 Corinthians 1:3

SERMON THEME: "Called to Save You!"

SERMON TEXT: Romans 10:9, 13-15, 17 (Read first)

Dear Friends in Christ,

Imagine the words of our text coming from a man who had, at an earlier time, rejected the teachings of Jesus Christ and His disciples! He had been a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council. He was present when the young missionary Stephen was stoned to death, consenting to his murder. This man, Saul by name, led the persecution against the movement called "The Way", the beginning of the Christian church. His intent was to destroy those who worshiped the risen Christ, believing in His name, being baptized, and living for Him!

Voicing "threats and murder" against the disciples of the Lord Jesus, he set out on a journey to Damascus, where he intended to search the synagogues for members of The Way, arrest them, and bring them back to Jerusalem as criminal captives.

As he traveled, suddenly he was immersed in a bright light! He fell to the ground, astonished and trembling. Then a voice: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?!" The men traveling with him were speechless; they, too, had heard the voice, but saw no one! Saul cried out, "Who are you...?!" The answer he was given would change his life for all of time and eternity: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting..."

As we read on, we come to realize this was the occasion of a divine Call, certainly dramatic in the extreme, but nevertheless God calling the Pharisee Saul to be His messenger! A man committed to destroying Christianity was about to become the greatest Christian missionary and preacher of all time! We know him as the apostle Paul. In Jesus' own words, "...he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before the Gentiles, kings and the children of Israel..." (Acts 9:15). Here we see also God's miracle of conversion!

Moses, Joshua, and all the prophets were singled out and called by God to speak His holy Word. In every age God has chosen

and anointed sinful men to speak His Word and minister to the spiritual and even physical needs of those whom He has created and loves! Until Jesus comes back He will continue to hand-pick certain men and equip them for a specific mission. It was Paul who later wrote, "... (Christ) Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry" (Ephesians 4:11ff.).

There is no greater or higher calling on this earth than that of being a messenger of God! And there is no greater burden of care or responsibility given to a human being. We see this in the words of God's Call to Ezekiel, who was called to be a prophet to the Jews held captive in Babylonia: "When I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand" (Ezekiel 3:18). In other words, if the prophet did not preach exactly what God told him to, his own soul would be in jeopardy! Every man sent by God is accountable for souls, a fact repeated by Paul in writing to young Pastor Timothy, "Take heed to yourself and to your teaching; hold to that, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Tim. 4:16).

It should be apparent by now that the hearer is accountable as well. In Hebrews 13 we find these words to Christians, "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as men who must give account" (v. 17). The pastor you will be calling is one God has chosen to save you! He will be accountable for preaching and teaching the truth, at the risk of his own soul. But you, baptized into Christ Jesus, are also called to be faithful in hearing God's Word, living by it, and obeying your pastor in spiritual matters. His authority is not from men, but from God! We believe the Spirit of the living Christ is the one who directs the Call process, empowering you to extend a Call. But once the Call is accepted, the pastor has the authority and duty to proclaim the Law and Gospel of God in all its truth and purity, and to administer the Sacraments according to Christ's institution. No human being or assembly has the authority to limit or modify the preaching of the truth! Insofar as a pastor is faithful to his calling, the duty of the people of God is to obey him, honor him, care for him, and thank the Lord God for him!

We live in a culture that is rebelling against the Law of God. Even in Christ's church many don't want to hear that they are sinners, and unless they turn from their sin, they can't be saved. One can easily hear a sermon today in which sin and repentance and hell are not even mentioned. Sometimes there is more story-telling and humor in preaching than Bible doctrine. So when you extend a Call, you want to be careful to bring in a shepherd who is strong in preaching both Law and Gospel! Remember Paul's words to the church in Corinth, "I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:1, 2). This is the kind of man you need!

This leads directly into our text! God's Son, our Lord Jesus, died to atone for our sins! It is through a living faith in Him and sincere repentance that we are saved. By faith His righteousness becomes ours! "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe *in your heart* that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved... For, 'every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved'" (vv. 9, 13). First we must learn what sin is, and its consequences—hear of God's wrath toward those who refuse to repent. But most importantly, we need to hear of the compassion and love of our heavenly Father, how He has chosen us, forgiven the sins of every penitent heart, justified us, and saved us from hell—not by works of righteousness we have done—but by His great mercy, His marvelous *grace*, through the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:4-7)!

And how do we hear? Without a preacher, a messenger of God, how would we have heard this good news?! Verses 14 and 15, "How are men to call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how can men preach unless they are sent?" Without a pastor, who would join souls with Christ through baptism and feed you at the Lord's Table? Who could you count on to console you and pray for and with you at the loss of a loved one? How many marriages got off to a bad start when there was no pastor to lead a couple to the altar to make their vows in the presence of almighty God? What about a godly example for the youth?

Scripture tells us Christ Jesus is the one Mediator between God

and man, but He's not the only one praying for you—for your daily well-being, for your salvation. Your pastor will also be approaching the throne of grace in your behalf, sometimes laying awake at night meditating on ways to help or nourish or encourage you. Then there are those precious hours in study, delving deep into the Bible to find the truth to share with you in Bible studies and worship and personal counseling.

Hopefully, each one of us here this morning has the salvation promised in Paul's inspired words. And it's likely that, for most of us, it was a pastor faithfully proclaiming Law and Gospel, who led us to the foot of Christ's cross where we could see firsthand the terrible consequence of our sins; and then led us to the open tomb to experience the joy of victory over sin, death, and the devil!

No wonder Paul recalls and quotes Isaiah (52:7), "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring good news, who proclaim salvation!" The feet of the messengers of God are lovely because they carry the man who brings you tidings of joy, who speaks words of peace and reconciliation with God the Father through Jesus the Son! The man who responds to your Call has been appointed by the God of heaven to carry on Christ's mission right here in Eugene! "Faith comes from what is heard"—verse 17—"and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ." This is what you should be seeking; a man who will preach words of God that will either bring you to faith, or strengthen your faith; a man who will teach you how to love—loving God above all and one's neighbor as much as oneself. The Holy Spirit will both enable him to proclaim the truth and empower you to believe and obey! And when you do, then you can call on the holy name of Jesus and know that you are His forever!

Imagine, if you possibly can, a world without prophets or evangelists or pastors. Without the hope and peace they bring through God's Word this life would be a hell on earth! God loves you; "God desires all men to be saved, and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). He does this through men He calls and equips. The pastor you will be calling will be working under our Lord's guidance, and he will be the human caretaker of your soul! He will be God's gift to you, and as such, special,

worthy of your love, your respect, your care, and your obedience. He will be set apart, not better than you, but having divine authority to carry on the Word and Sacrament ministry begun by Jesus Himself. We live in a time when false teachers and heterodox churches can be found just about anywhere. All the more reason to thank and bless God for sending you a man true to the Word!

Blessed' and rewarding as the office of the public ministry is, it is also very stressful and at times discouraging. People don't always listen. Members fall prey to the roaring lion, the devil. Sometimes the weight of the burdens of others becomes almost too much. Society is becoming increasingly anti-church, and tries to coax away the faithful and especially the youth. We live in the latter days, and more than ever need to say "No!" to anything or anyone who tempts us to give less than full support to our pastor and congregation. I urge you, when your Call for a new pastor bears fruit, to love him as God's man, to listen to and obey him, and be willing to work and sacrifice and do whatever is necessary to advance the mission of Christ in this place!

And so importantly, PRAY! Pray now, pray for the man who accepts the Call, and continue to pray regularly, beseeching the Lord's presence and help as you strive to move forward to God's eternal glory! I still remember the words of an elderly woman in my first parish, spoken now well over 30 years ago: "Pastor, I pray for you every day." The Lord knows how much that meant to me! It is every pastor's dream that every member really get into the Word of God, and give his or her heart to Christ! Love Jesus and trust in Him, and follow His footsteps to the cross, and after that, to the golden streets of the New Jerusalem! Then and there all true believers will see our blessed Redeemer face to face, together with the sainted Paul whose journey on that road to Damascus turned out to be the start of his journey to glory!

We close in prayer, as found in TLH, #489:

Lord of the church, we humbly pray
For those who guide us in Thy way
And speak Thy holy Word.
With love divine their hearts inspire
And truth their lips with hallowed fire
And needful strength afford.

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**Help them to preach the truth of God,
Redemption thro' the Savior's blood,
Nor let the Spirit cease
On all the church His gifts to show'r—
To them a messenger of power;
To us, of life and peace.
In Jesus' name, Amen.**

**The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding will
keep your hearts and minds through a living faith in Christ Jesus.
Amen.**

Rev. Donald P. Tonack