

Called to Ministry Class One

Welcome Back for the returning students and Welcome to those who are first timers. Class notes should always be available in hard copy in class and available online at the church website. The lectures themselves as delivered in class also ought to be available online. So if you can't make class and want to hear you can. While we will be working through various texts of scripture, what you will end up with at the end is less a brief commentary on a particular book of scripture as a series of lessons on the topic of God's calling of various individuals.

Often when those seeking ordination to the office of Minister of the Word are examined, they tell a story of "calling". They describe how they came to believe that God had 'called' them to become an ordained Minister. The stories are as varied as the people and personalities involved...but they often contain similar elements in whatever combination. Luke, the writer of the most words in the New Testament, describes the "calling" of a number of people, some uniquely qualified and in some ways highly expected candidates for leadership and others not so much. Still in all of these stories in his two volume work, we call Luke and Acts, he details a number of features to how God made known his presence and calling upon various people's lives, so that they 'knew' they were 'called' to Ministry.

Called to Ministry

Class One

I thought to study these stories for the same reason we study Scripture in general...so that we can learn more about Who God is...and How God does things. I thought to study and reflect on these things also because I think that one of the chief elements of change between what the New Testament calls the Old Testament is this calling to ministry. I have come to believe that baptism in the New Testament is analogous to what circumcision was intended to represent. However, circumcision came to represent much less than what was intended and sadly baptism is often down-sized in the Christian Church so that we fail to appreciate our baptism, as 'God's calling' upon our life.

In each of these stories of 'calling' it was necessary that the person called 'knew' they had specifically and personally been called by God. Next, it was necessary that they 'knew' to what ministry they had been called by God to serve. These two questions are at the heart of our own Christian lives.

Called to Ministry Class One

Adam and Eve were created, and called not only to marry and be fruitful and multiply but to serve as priests in the Garden, representing God to his creation and representing God's creation to him, in governance. The Garden of Eden was a sanctuary, a place where God met with his creatures or subjects as king. The authority of God's reign as king was to radiate out from the 'Holy Mountain', the 'Garden of God'. In the ancient world Kings had gardens in which to rest from their enemies. The Garden rest was an enthronement of the victor...who now had achieved 'rest' from his enemies. This rest was not seen as idleness...but the exercise of sovereign authority in peacetime. Victory preceded rest, as triumph must precede victory parades. In fact, worship is a Sabbath rest of victory, to exalt the Victor, who has ascended the throne, and reigns.

I am grateful to Dr. Dean Deppe once again for his excellent book, All Roads Lead to the Text. This book outlines eight different methods of studying God's Word. Perhaps the hidden jewel is the way he illustrates the use of these different methods in actual Bible Study ideas. These can form a lengthy list of study ideas and teaching topics. It is Dr. Deppe's insights into Luke's call narratives that have prompted me to pursue this semester's class because of the affirmation of the Protestant Reformation of "The Priesthood of all believers" the long held belief that every member of the Church is called...to Ministry. Further, I have come to believe that this is illustrated in the sacrament of Baptism (either infant or adult or believer's baptism). Based on the curiosity of how the mikveh or self baptism practiced in Judaism is transformed into the Christian sacramental practice of one person baptizing another. See Ex 29:4-6 and Lev 8:5ff.

Called to Ministry Class One

If I am right, then each believer has been created and redeemed for a life of ministry. Our lives, gifts and talents, and resources are not randomly given to us but have each been assigned to us for the purpose of advancing the King's purpose and agenda for His Kingdom. Each of us has at least one if not several roles to play. I have heard it said, but have also said it myself...incorrectly, I now know, that the "Bible does not mention retirement." That is incorrect. Actually, in relation to priests, retirement is mentioned in terms of serving in the Temple. See Num 8:23f. This suggests to me that we may have chapters in our service. As Eccl. 3 suggests there is a time for everything under Heaven. So we may or may not be called to one ministry or calling our whole life but I would suggest that if we are alive we have been called for something until we die.

Dr. Deppe has nicely sketched out 4 common elements to each narrative of God calling...

Entrance of Divine Epiphany

Empowerment with or by the Spirit

Endowment with self-consciousness

Explanation of the Mission

Our passages for study this semester will be

The Call of Zechariah the priest Lk 1:11-17

The Epiphany of Zechariah about John the Baptist Lk 1:67, 76

The Epiphany to Mary about Jesus Lk 1:26-38

The Confirming Praise of Simeon regarding Jesus and His mission Lk 2:25-35

Jesus' Baptism Lk 3:21-22

Jesus' First Sermon Lk 4:18-19

Called to Ministry

Class One

Saul's Conversion and Dual Call to Ministry Acts 9

Central structure of the Book of Acts in light of Saul/Paul's Call

Last third of Acts in light of Paul's other Calling

Homework

Read Luke 1:1-25

Begin to write your story. This week I would like you to begin to write a bit about your beginning, family, early faith training and experience.