

Acts 13:1-5

Now in the church at Antioch there were some prophets and teachers: Barnabas; Simeon, who was called Niger; Lucius of Cyrene; Manaen, who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch; and Saul. ² While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” ³ Then, after they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them off.

⁴ So they were sent out by the Holy Spirit and went down to Seleucia. From there they sailed to Cyprus. ⁵ When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. They also had John as their assistant.

Dear children of God who are called by God to be his disciples,

It can be one of the most traumatic experiences of childhood. You stand next to your buddies shuffling from one foot to the other, clenching and unclenching your hands in nervous anticipation. You stare at the two boys in front of you who will decide your immediate fate. It is the dreaded picking of teams. Two boys are selected as captains and they take turns choosing boys to be on their team. Every boy waiting in line is thinking the same thing, “Please, don’t let me be picked last.”

Today we have heard about a number of men picked by the Lord to follow him and serve him. Unlike picking teams at recess, which can be fairly predictable, one would never imagine the people the Lord picks, or calls, to follow and serve him. So, rather than be worried or concerned, we can all:

Theme: Marvel At The Lord’s Calling

- 1. He calls all kinds of people**
- 2. He calls us to do all kinds of work**

One thing that you will notice if you read much of the Bible at all is that God calls all kinds of people to be his followers. We heard in our Old Testament lesson how God called Elisha to be his messenger to God’s people after Elijah the prophet was done. We heard in our Gospel lesson how Jesus called ordinary fishermen to follow him. These are just a couple of examples. But, read the Bible and you will see that this is the rule rather than the exception. God called Moses to be his messenger to the Pharaoh of Egypt. Moses was an eighty year old man at the time who had fled Egypt at the age of forty because he had murdered a man. Then, he had spent the next forty years herding sheep. David was the runt of the litter, the youngest of his brothers. And yet he was called to be the greatest king Israel ever knew. God used a prostitute in the city of Jericho to save his spies in that city and she became an ancestor of Jesus, the Savior of the world.

Our sermon text for today also includes some unlikely characters to be called by the Lord. There was a thriving Christian church in the city of Antioch (that’s north and a bit west of Israel). In this church, we are told, there were prophets and teachers. There was, for example, a man named Barnabas. He was a

Jewish man from the island of Cyprus whose real name was Joseph. But, the Christians came to call him Barnabas, which means “Son of Encouragement”, because that was the sort of person he was - always encouraging. Then, there was Simeon called Niger. We don’t know very much about him. There was Lucius of Cyrene. Cyrene was the capital of Libya in northern Africa. Can you remember someone else from that city? Simon of Cyrene was the man who was forced to carry Jesus’ cross on Good Friday. Perhaps Simon became a believer in Christ and took the message about Jesus back to Cyrene with him, where Lucius heard about it. What are the chances that Lucius would become a follower of Christ? Not good by our reckoning. But, one hundred percent by God’s reckoning.

The next man is rather interesting - Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch). This man was raised with “**Herod the tetrarch.**” This was the Herod who arrested John the Baptist and had him beheaded. He was also the Herod who was in Jerusalem when Jesus was arrested and Pilate sent Jesus to him to stand trial. Remember how Jesus refused to speak to him so he had Jesus mocked and beaten? Who would ever have thought that someone who had been raised with an ungodly man like Herod would become a Christian, much less a teacher in the Christian Church?

And then there was Saul. We know him better as Paul – one of the greatest missionary of all time and the writer of no less than thirteen books of the New Testament. And what had Paul done to deserve this honor? He had been a strong opponent of the early Christian Church. He had watched with approval as men stoned Stephen to death. He had been the ringleader of those who persecuted Christians. He had been on his way to Damascus in order to round up Christians and put them in prison when the Lord...called Him to be a follower and servant of Jesus Christ. Over and over again God called the least likely people to be HIS people. Listen to how St. Paul described some of the members of the Christian church in Corinth. “**Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were.**” (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

And what about you? What were you? Were you any more deserving to be called by God to be his child? Was I? On September 26, 1965 I was brought to the waters of Holy Baptism and God made me his child, knowing that I had inherited a sinful nature from my parents, knowing that I would sin against him again and again, knowing that I would disobey my parents, knowing that I would fight with my siblings, knowing that I would often be an embarrassment to him. And yet, God called me!

We talked two weeks ago about Baptism and Josie Rae Henning who was just baptized - to have God’s name written on her spiritual birth certificate. She has done nothing to deserve this honor. She has done nothing but inherit a sinful nature from her parents. And yet, God calls her to be his own and, as Martin Luther says in his Catechism, “...to live under him in his kingdom and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.” When you look at the people God calls to be part of his family, you cannot help but marvel. He calls all kinds - murderers and prostitutes and even persecutors of his people, folks from Cyprus and Cyrene and all the other nations of the earth. He has even called you and me. Isn’t it a marvel?

But, it gets even more marvelous! He not only calls us to be members of his family. He calls us to work on His behalf! Our text tells us that the four men I mentioned earlier were prophets and teachers at the church in Antioch. But then, the Lord had a special task for two of them. We are told that, “**While**

they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them’” (v. 2). So that is what they did. And Barnabas and Saul sailed off for the island of Cyprus to tell people about Jesus.

You have not been called by the Holy Spirit to sail to Cyprus and tell people about Jesus. But, that doesn't mean the Lord has not called you to serve in his kingdom and on his behalf. Every Christian in this room has been called by God to serve on his behalf. Granted, we have different calls. Some of us have what we refer to as calls into the “public” ministry. This simply means that God has called us to serve on behalf of other Christians. I have a call into the public ministry as a pastor. I preach on your behalf. I serve the Lord's Supper on your behalf. The Sunday School teachers serve on our behalf. I cannot spend ten to twelve hours each day preparing for and teaching my children. Neither can you. So, the Holy Spirit has called those men and women to do this on our behalf.

But, just because you are not a pastor in our church or a teacher in our school does not mean that the Lord has not called you to serve on his behalf. Whatever situation you find yourself in at this stage of your life, you carry out those responsibilities on his behalf.

Think for just a moment about all the different callings God has given you at this stage of your life. See if you can think of at least three. Are you a mother or father? A husband or wife? Are you caring for your aging parents? Are you a coach or an athlete? Have you thought of at least three? Now, think of how you can best carry out the callings God has given you. If you are married, you have been called by God to serve your spouse, to be a friend, to listen when they need to bend an ear and to encourage them when they are discouraged. If you are single, you have been called by God to respect those you date, to show the world what a Godly single person looks like in a culture with no end of wrongheaded ideas. If you have children, you have been called by God to raise those children on his behalf - to teach them and show them right from wrong, to tell them who he is and what he has done for them, to demonstrate a trust in God so that they will know that he can handle anything life throws at them. If you are an electrician or a plumber or work in a warehouse - whatever profession you currently profess - you have been called by God to be the best electrician or plumber or warehouse worker you can be, to be honest and fair and hard working. If you are a student, you have been called by God to be the best student you can be, to be respectful of your teachers, to learn all you can, to be faithful in doing your homework. If you are retired, you have been called by God at this stage in your life to use your time wisely to serve him and others however you can. It might be by helping out at church. It might be by helping out a neighbor who can't fend for herself. It might be to pray for those who are serving in ways you no longer can.

We could go on and on. Isn't it amazing how many different kinds of work God has called us to do on his behalf? And, aren't you eternally grateful that God called his Son, Jesus, to be your Savior? Isn't it good to know that, for all the times you have failed to fulfill your callings, Jesus perfectly fulfilled his? To Jesus, it did not matter how difficult his calling was, He only and always wanted to fulfill it to the glory of his Father. His calling took him all the way to the hell so that we would never need to experience what our sins deserve. I don't know how you fared when it came to the picking of teams when you were young. For me, it was directly related to how skilled in the game we were about to play. Regardless of how quickly you were picked by your friends when you were a child, marvel that the Lord has called you to be his child. And then throw yourself fully into all of the works into which he has called you. Amen.