

“CHURCH IS SOMETHING YOU ARE, NOT WHERE YOU GO: CALLED OUT!!”

Lenten Thursday 1

Peace Lutheran
Grass Valley, CA

February 26, 2015

Ephesians 2: 1 – 10
II Corinthians 5: 16-21
Luke 5: 1 – 11

TEACHING POINTS FROM THE MESSAGE:

1. “Moved out” and “called out.”
2. We must live our lives as fully worthy of the name of Christ as possible.
3. Our “called-out-ness” is to be representatives of Christ in the world.
4. Paul calls us “ambassadors”.
5. We are called out from our “home place” to be Christ to the world. It is a call to service.
6. We are a people called out to be ambassadors in representing Christ in the world, so that God gets the glory, so that God’s power, love, forgiveness and mercy are reflected into our world.

Personal story of our weekly “trek” with my family to be a part of Worship on Sunday Mornings (and other times) with my family.

It was a sometimes stressful, a sometimes wonderful journey. But the importance was that we were part of a small mob that came to join before God as the Church in Broken Bow, NE. Those Sunday trips were an important part of my life then and wonderfully formational for who I am today. They are still an important part of my week—the being “moved out” of bed and the comforts of home into the community is as deep in me as is being “moved out” to get on my bike, or to join my family for a meal.

We are a “called out” people. Being “Church” is to be “called out” of self into unity with Christ. It is being “called out” from our routines in the world into union with Christ and into service for Christ.

Now, I understand that “called out” has a different meaning for a younger generation. When I speak of “called out” I’m meaning that we are pulled away from one thing to and into another thing. We are pulled out of our selves into a unity with Christ. We are moved and motivated out of one frame of reference into another frame of reference; or from one world into another contrasting world.

When some younger than I speaks of “called out” they may mean something more like, “here is the truth about you”. Or, it has a tone of confronting someone as in “I called him/her out about his/her behavior.” (I hope I’ve got that straight.)

The Greek word for church literally means “called from self-centeredness to union with Christ.” It is a call to sacrifice. And, frankly, our “called-out-ness” rather works both ways the term is used: 1) We are “called out” to the truth about us – we are church, it is who we are; and 2) we are “called out” to be the church, to be who we are in following Christ into the world.

Probably nowhere is this sense of being “called out” as vivid as in the calling of the disciples. They were called to follow Jesus from one kind of life to another. There they were doing what was comfortable and usual. There they were in the menial of their daily lives. But Jesus steps in and calls them out. Calls them from self to sacrifice — leave everything and follow me. Calls them out to tell them who they are — “fishers of men.” In so doing, Jesus sets the tone for the church as something we are—a called out people.

Our “called-out-ness” is to be representatives of Christ in the world.

Paul calls us “ambassadors”. As “ambassadors” we are called from self to mission. Think about a “political” ambassador. They are called out of home to a foreign place where they represent the “home country”. They are the ones that people look at to see what the ambassador’s home country looks like. They are the only “foreign country” some people see.

Likewise in representing that home country they are “supplied” by that home country. Their livelihood comes from there. Their safety comes from there. When there is a big need they go back “home.”

The same is true for we who are the Church. We are the ambassadors of Christ. We are sent from our “home place” to represent Christ to the world. We are called out from our “home place” to be Christ to the world. It is a call to sacrifice. It is a call to service. It is a call from self to other. If the church were just someplace we go, none of this would make any sense at all. But since the church isn’t where we go, it is who we are, it adds up that we are called out to be ambassadors and fisher people for God.

It is this “called out” idea that makes us the church unique. Called out is about going. Going out to be God’s people for the other. Called out is about being ambassadors into the world. Going out as ambassadors.

The “called out” model means that it isn’t about getting people in our doors, but getting outside the doors to where people are. The going out model stands in contrast to many models of church today. It means that church isn’t where we go, “attracting people” to come and be with us. It means that church isn’t where we go, longing some how for people to “go” with us. The “going out” model means that church is who we are, people who, fed and nourished around God’s table, go out to be with people. “Going out” means that we become “attracted” to hurting and needy people in the world and serve them. “Going out” means that we are “attracted to what God is up to in the world and get involved.

Church is not where I go, it is how I lived “called out” to be a message of Christ in the world.

No doubt you’ve heard the quotation of former ELCA Bishop Herbert Chilstrom “Be careful how you live you may be the only ‘Bible’ some people read.”

Certainly, sometimes unfortunately, people are watching how we represent Christ to the world. People are watching every step we make, just as natives watch every step a political ambassador makes in a foreign country. We must live our lives as fully worthy of the name of Christ as possible. How we live our lives is a good measure of how fully, how completely, we are church – Christ church in the world.

That’s the importance of our union with Christ. Union with Christ in baptism marks us with the cross and names us as “church”.

Let’s take it one step further. In Ephesians, Paul talks about the nature of being church, of our creation as those who are in union with Jesus.

Here is what we are created for: for good works—to reflect the goodness of God in everything we say and do. The reason for all this is so that God gets the glory.

That’s what it means to say we are church. We are a people called out to be ambassadors in representing Christ in the world, so that God gets the glory, so that God’s power, love, forgiveness and mercy are reflected into our world.

Amen.