

Last fall, when the Kerygma Bible Study group first started reading the book of Revelation, I had the pleasure of sitting in with them while they were discussing the greetings to the churches at the beginning of the book. Although John, the writer, was addressing each of the earliest Christian churches in places like Ephesus and Smyrna, we could see similarities between their congregations and ours, and it seemed as if John could have been speaking directly to our own church, despite the many centuries between us.

And whenever I read one of the opening greetings at the beginning of one of Paul's letters, it can also feel like he's writing directly to us, also. Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God: To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are made holy in Christ Jesus, called to be God's men and women, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is their Lord and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

To all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is as if he's right here among us passing the peace. To the church of God that is in Westport: Grace to you and peace through God and Christ. Grace and peace to you, fellow Christians. Peace be with you. Grace and Peace to the people of Christ & Holy Trinity Church.

In this letter, Paul encourages the Corinthians (and us), telling us that, as the church, Christ is among us, between us and within us, that not only has God called us together, but will provide all the strength and spiritual gifts we need to live out our calling. "God is faithful," he writes. "By him you were called into the fellowship of his son Jesus Christ our Lord." By him you were called. You were called into this fellowship with each other. There's nothing like a letter from Paul to get things back into perspective.

Normally, we think of our selves as having chosen to come here this morning, and I guess on one level we did choose. Any of us could be home having a bagel and reading the paper right now – or sleeping in. But instead we chose to get up, get dressed, maybe get the kids dressed and fed, out the door and here on time for the liturgy. When you started attending Christ & Holy Trinity, you might have looked around at some different churches and chose this one above others to be the place for you. Or perhaps this morning you're here checking us out to see if this might be the place you'd like to choose. On the other hand, maybe you've been coming here ever since you were little and you've chosen to stick with it through thick and thin. Or maybe you come from an old Episcopal or Anglican family and when you moved to town there was no question that this would be the church you would choose.

In one way or another, we have all chosen to be here by our own free will. But I think it's very important to remember that on another level, it's God who has done the choosing. We've all been called here. We've been called from a variety of different places and different perspectives, each bringing an array of unique gifts, to come together and be the church. No matter what route we each took to get here, we were all answering God's call. God's got hopes and dreams for us. And God's call to us is ongoing as we try and discern how we are being called, both individually and as a church, to serve the world.

Two of John's disciples were following Jesus on the road. "What are you looking for?" Jesus asked them. "Teacher," they said, "where are you staying?" "Come and see," he answered, calling them to investigate, to become involved, to explore the possibilities. Come and see. Don't take my word for it, come and see for yourself. Come learn about me. Spend some time with me. Develop a relationship with me. In the story these seekers went to see and they remained with him. Then one of them even went to get his brother, telling him, "We've found the Messiah - Come and see!" And they brought him to Jesus.

That disciple came because his brother invited him. His brother had come because his teacher suggested he check it out. His teacher had seen a vision of a dove during a baptism. There are as many ways as there are people to perceive the call. But the source of the call is God. And God has called us all here. The Gospel today describes

the call of Simon, who Jesus would call Peter, which means rock. Peter the rock became the founder of the whole Christian church. He was called – just like you and I are – called to serve. We are all called to be the church.

Isaiah wrote, in what is called the servant's song,

“The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me. And he said to me, ‘you are my servant.’ I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth, because the Lord, who is faithful, has chosen you.”

This Old Testament passage, which often interpreted as a prefiguring of the Messiah – the Christ, also prefigures the Body of Christ in the world – the church. The church – which is a community of people who have been called by God to be a light to the nations. The church – which is you and me from the time of Paul's letters right up through time until this very moment.

This weekend we commemorate the birth of Dr. Martin Luther King, a man of unusual intellect and clear vision, and whose ears were unusually open to God's call, who became a Baptist minister as his father and grandfather had also done before him. But the times and situation of his own life and ministry called him strongly into a ministry of leadership and justice. He received his doctorate when he was only 24 years old, and was called to a position at a Baptist church in Montgomery, Alabama, where he became more and more involved in the civil rights movement. In 1957 he was elected president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, a new and influential civil rights organization that sought to mobilize the moral influence of the black churches. King anchored the organization on the rock of the Christian tradition, and utilized the tool of non-violent civil disobedience as described by Thoreau and used successfully by Gandhi in India. Between 1957 and 1968 Martin Luther King did great things. He traveled over six million miles and spoke in public over 2500 times, wrote five books and numerous articles. He led protests and voter drives and marches on Washington. He conferred with presidents. He was arrested as a conscientious objector 20 times, was physically assaulted by those who felt threatened by him at least four times, awarded five honorary degrees, was named Man of the Year by Time magazine in 1963 and one year later, at age 35, was the youngest person to receive the Nobel Peace Prize.

In February of 1968, just a few weeks before his assassination, King preached a sermon in his church, the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. He said,

“If you want to be important—wonderful. If you want to be recognized—wonderful. If you want to be great—wonderful. But recognize that he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. That's Jesus' definition of greatness. And this morning, the thing that I like about it: by giving that definition of greatness, it means that everybody can be great, because everybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve. You don't have to know about Plato and Aristotle to serve. You don't have to know Einstein's theory of relativity to serve. You don't have to know the second theory of thermodynamics in physics to serve. You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love. And you can be that servant.”

You and I may not have as much clarity on what we are called to do with this one life of ours as Martin Luther King did. But as he said, “Faith is taking the first step, even when you don't see the whole staircase.” Paul was called. Peter was called. Martin Luther King was called. And you and I are also called to be God's servants. To be the church. To serve the Lord with gladness and singleness of heart. What does that mean for you in your life? Follow God and discover for yourself. Come and see!