

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Sixth Sunday after Trinity, July 11, 2010

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Hymns: 485, 493:1, 490, 483, 509.

Lessons: Deuteronomy 18:15-22, Acts 22: 1-21, Matthew 9:35 – 10:6.

Text: Ephesians 1:1a

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The man we know as “Saint Paul” has quite a history. We call him a “saint” because he is one of God’s holy ones, cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. Next week we will look at why he, in this letter to the Christians at Ephesus and other letters, calls believers “saints”.

In our Epistle lesson, you heard in his own words that he was born a Jew in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia in Asia Minor, which is now the country of Turkey, about 500 miles from Jerusalem, but he was brought up in Jerusalem. He was trained in Jewish laws and customs under Gamaliel, a well-known Jewish teacher. We know that he was a Roman Citizen, too. He is named “Saul” up through Acts 13, while at Paphos on the island of Cyprus. Then he is first called “Paul”, although no reason is given: *“Then Saul, who was also called Paul.”* Acts 13:9.

It is interesting that he might have been the most well-educated of the apostles of Jesus, and we generally say that there were actually 13 apostles, Paul being considered the 13th. But it was not his education, which we might compare to an advanced university degree today that made him qualified to be an apostle. God called him directly to be an apostle, and used his gifts in the work of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentile world. That is what qualified him. Today let’s talk about

PAUL, AN APOSTLE OF JESUS CHRIST

- 1. Paul was called by Jesus Christ to be an apostle and sent to the Gentiles.**
- 2. Because he was called by Christ, his words have authority.**
- 3. Today God also calls men to serve Him in the church.**

Our epistle lesson might have served as a sermon text for today, but in coming weeks we will be looking at verses from Ephesians. In the epistle lesson St. Paul speaks of his calling directly by Jesus Christ to be a teacher and preacher of the Gospel to the Gentiles. *“Then the Lord said to me, ‘Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’* Acts 22:21. But there is one word in our sermon text that summarizes his calling. That is the word “apostle”, and is fully encompassed in the phrase *“an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God”*. In our Gospel lesson you have Jesus’ first 12 apostles named. Luke tells us that Jesus himself called or named them apostles: *“he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles.”* Luke 6:13. Because Paul identifies himself as *“an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God”*, we know that Jesus himself, who appeared to Saul, later called Paul an “apostle”.

The word “apostle” means “messenger, one that is sent, a delegate”, and more specifically an ambassador of the Gospel; officially a formal representative of Christ.

Saul was a Pharisee and an especially evil enemy of Christianity. In his zeal for traditional Judaism he persecuted Christians in Jerusalem and even in the outlying regions. You heard how in the course of an intended

raid on Christians in Damascus Saul was confronted by the risen Christ in a blinding light, who demanded of him, *"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."* Acts 9:4-6

Jesus corrected Saul's errors and he was converted by the work of the Holy Spirit. Saul the persecutor became Paul the Christian. But that was obviously not Paul's doing. It came about, he acknowledges, *"by the will of God."* But God was not content merely to have Paul as a Christian follower, a disciple and learner. God wanted to have Paul serve as an apostle. An apostle by definition is someone who is sent out, a representative who speaks for the one sending him. By God's will Paul speaks as an *"apostle of Christ Jesus."* Thus Paul's words have authority. Like the 13 letters of the New Testament written by Paul, the letter to the Ephesians may come from Paul's pen, but regarding the content, Paul the apostle says, 'this is what the Lord says.' Paul was called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ, and because of that, his words have authority.

Paul has established his authority. He was sent by Christ, and is doing what he is doing: preaching, teaching, and writing, *"by the will of God"*. He isn't doing it just because he decided to do it. He didn't make up his mind to be a representative in the way someone decides "I'm going to be a salesman" or "I'm going to be an engineer" or "I'm going to be a farmer." No, he is doing his life's work because God wants him to do it. He had a special calling, meeting Jesus face-to-face on the road to Damascus and he then realized that what he was doing was not merely to advance his personal fortune in life. He was doing what he did to serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

He was called directly by the Lord. We read *"For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything."* Acts 9:9. He had a lot to learn, and that continued in the house of a man named Judas in Damascus, helped also by a man called Ananias.

We read in Acts 9:8-24: *"Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight." "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name." But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord--Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here--has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ. After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him, but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him."*

So the man in our sermon text was called to serve God, by preaching and teaching about Jesus. Every Christian has a calling to follow and serve Christ. God tells us in 1 Peter 2:9 *"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who*

called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." Every Christian is a priest, part of the priesthood of all believers. In their homes, among their brethren and neighbors, in their contacts with the world each and every Christian should by their words and by their lives show forth the praises of Him who has called them out of darkness and into his marvelous light. They should be witnesses to Christ, confess Him before men, teach his Word, rebuke sin, admonish and comfort, pray and intercede for others. But God has instructed the church to call servants, just as St. Paul was a servant and was called directly by Christ.

St. Paul himself, writing by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost writes ***"It was he [that is, God,] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."*** Ephesians 4:11-16.

Today, congregations call men to preach to them, and to teach them about Jesus. These men do these things in the name of the congregation which has called him. Occasionally, congregations also call women to teach their children. This is completely in agreement with Scripture. No one should serve in the public ministry unless he is first called.

The public preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments, church discipline and the excommunication of the impenitent sinner from a congregation are things which no individual Christian may claim for himself on the basis of the priesthood of all believers. In these matters the entire congregation acts, and it acts through its called minister.

The office of the ministry was not invented by men but instituted by God. It is the will of God that Christians function as a group, and as a congregation or as a church body call men to serve them. One passage which speaks of such servants and leaders of the congregation at Ephesus reads ***"Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood."*** Acts 20:28 So it is plain that God makes men overseers of Christian congregations. Thus we confess in the Book of Concord that "wherever the Church is, there is authority to administer the Gospel, to retain the authority to call, elect, and ordain ministers." These ministers are called by God through the congregation. An individual man prepares himself for the public ministry, but it is a congregation or a church body which extends a divine call, and says 'we want you to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments in our behalf, in our stead'. So in this way even today men are called by God through a group of Christians to serve them.

In St. Paul we find one who serves God having been called directly by Jesus Christ in a most unusual way. That The Holy Ghost inspired him to write down God's will was another special gift of God. We have the Holy Scriptures to guide us today, so that all our teaching and preaching has a solid foundation. We don't need to take majority votes to decide what our doctrine and resulting practice will be. ***"For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."*** 2 Peter 1:21 And we have God's guidance in calling men to preach that Word of God to us.

Lord, grant that we always keep your doctrine pure! Amen.