

When Were You Called by God?

by Pastor Kurt Hoover

Pentecost Litany based on Psalm 8

Leader: When I look at your heavens,

All: the work of your fingers,

Leader: the moon and the stars,

All: which you have set in place,

Leader: what is man that you are mindful of him,

All: and the son of man that you care for him?

Leader: We worship you, Lord, In the name of the Father and The Son and The Holy Spirit.

Hosea 5:15-6:6 I will return again to my place,
until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face,
and in their distress earnestly seek me.

“Come, let us return to the Lord;
for he has torn us, that he may heal us;
he has struck us down, and he will bind us up.

² After two days he will revive us;
on the third day he will raise us up,
that we may live before him.

³ Let us know; let us press on to know the Lord;
his going out is sure as the dawn;
he will come to us as the showers,
as the spring rains that water the earth.”

⁴ What shall I do with you, O Ephraim?
What shall I do with you, O Judah?

Your love is like a morning cloud,
like the dew that goes early away.

⁵ Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets;
I have slain them by the words of my mouth,
and my judgment goes forth as the light.

⁶ For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice,
the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

Matthew 9:9-13 ⁹ As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him.

¹⁰ And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. ¹¹ And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” ¹² But when he heard it, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³ Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” – Matthew 9:13

Jesus is sitting at a business lunch. Tax collectors and other notables trying to win influence over each other. I imagine a boisterous and proud group of men trying to outdo each other. The wine is flowing and the meal is extravagant. Rich spices and aromas. And most striking... this meal is in a public place. It is a display of connection and status.

To the religious leaders and to us today it would seem ridiculous. Why would Jesus risk his reputation by eating with these sinners. It isn't sending the right signals.

Jesus' reply is even more shocking. He quotes an unpopular prophecy from Hosea. ¹³ *Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” (Matthew 9:13)*

A loose translation of the original in Hosea chapter 6, verse 6:

⁶ *For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice,
the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.*

This is a direct challenge to what we as religious people value. Our sacrifices, our righteousness, our good deeds... the credit we

have established for all the good religious choices we have made over the years.

If you wanted a stellar reputation in Ancient Israel, you wore the right prayer shawl, you avoided unclean food and unclean people... and above all else you gave the right sacrifices. The burnt offering. The ultimate religious symbol.

Jesus did not come into the world to make religious people more religious. He didn't even come into the world to make sinners more religious.

Jesus didn't come into the world to increase your righteousness. Nor was the healing for the sick of this world, that He has to give, going to increase our ability to be righteous.

Jesus came into the world to *'call'* sinners. Tax collectors, Sabbath breakers, rough and crude, selfish and broken... sinners. Jesus came into the world to ruin reputations. Jesus came into the world that we might stop hiding behind our religious practices and value signals to risk actual ministry with those who need it most.

And it just maybe that those who needed it most are those who are pretending they have it all together. The Pharisee in each of us.

When Jesus says He came to call sinners it is a clever play on words. He is obviously referring to the table of boisterous, money loving, unclean men he is eating with. But Jesus is also referring to each of us when we think our goodness is what makes us useful in the world. Jesus has come to call sinners into a life of purpose beyond their selfish ambitions, but just as important Jesus has come to call religious people out of their false hope in themselves.

For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."
(Matthew 9:13)

The only person useful to God is someone who can acknowledge their selfishness... self-loathing or self-righteous... we all have a sin problem. You're not the only one. And yes! Oh yes you have been called.

You have been building on your own ability to be forgiven and set free your whole life. You are the sinner God has called out of your self-loathing and self-righteousness.

You do know God and have found in him love of self and neighbor.

Let me ask you... When were you called to serve God?

Most of us have some kind of call story. That moment in our lives when something happened and we began to follow Christ. It may have felt strongly like a decision, maybe an ultimatum. The last chance to turn around before sliding down a slippery path.

Maybe it was much more subtle. In conversation with friends, or well listening to a song or a sermon, you came to realize that God has set you upon the right path. You have the desire to follow Him.

When were you called by God?

My call came at Bible camp. I went to college with a pre-Med major. Hated Chemistry and Math, but I loved humanities and religion class. I wrote a letter to my pastor asking how I can best serve God, could it be as a pastor? I honestly thought He would tell me I wasn't qualified to be a pastor or a church leader for that matter. Certainly, there are some mistakes that must be avoided if you are going to fill such an important role in the church. At the very least I should have been more involved in youth group, right?

To my surprise my pastor's letter back was a glowing affirmation of all the things he had seen in me that would make me a great pastor. Things I hadn't seen in myself.

Then I went to Bible camp as a counselor for the summer. I lead Bible studies and prayers and campfire songs. I talked about my faith with my peers and the kids. It became clear this was something I was good at and enjoyed doing. God called me into a life of ministry.

When were you called by God into your life of ministry?

For some of you it was literally a phone call from a member of the nominating committee asking for you to serve on one of the church boards. For others it was signing up to serve in a life group or join a Bible study that launched you into a new type of ministry.

When were you called?

Maybe it was your spouse who said you are going to church whether you want to or not? That is what this family does. Maybe it was more mutual agreement about what matters most in life.

For many parenthood is a turning point. Suddenly life isn't about you and what you want anymore. You are compelled to nurture your child, and the mind can't help but think about someone else's needs. That certainly is a calling. A sense of purpose. More than just raising a family, but an introduction into what it really means to need and be part of a community.

When were you called by God?

Volunteer hours in high school or middle school? You got a taste of the fulfillment that comes from making a difference where there is a need.

Some churches consider confirmation a mini ordination. The initiation into the priesthood of all believers that Luther talked about. The students each receive a stole just like a pastor does. And certainly, when you are confirmed in your faith by God and the community you have stood before God and family and friends saying, Yes this is who I am. A follower of Christ. This whole church and Jesus thing is something I want, not just something Mom and Dad make me do.

When were you called by God into a life of ministry?

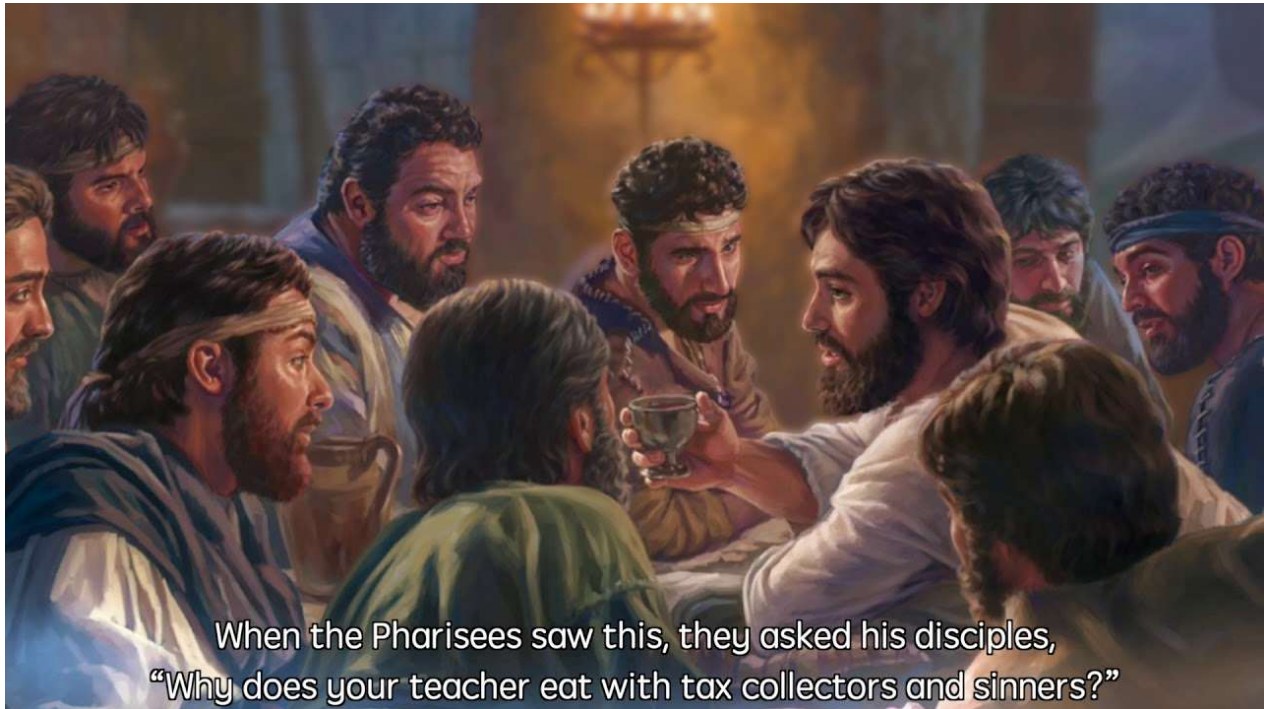
You may be surprised to learn that the most certain and clear calling from God into a life of ministry was in your Baptism.

I have called you by name, you are mine. – Isaiah 43:1

You do not need a moment of decision or clarity to follow Jesus. The reality is that you have been doing it your whole life. The calling of a Christian is a lifelong discovery of your talents and gifts. Your ability to listen and forgive. Your ability to affirm and set free. Your ability to bare the image of God... often without expecting or preparing for it. You have been built up in this your whole life. Because Jesus has all authority, not just authority after you recognize he is there.

And just as important you have been building on your own ability to be forgiven and set free your whole life. You are the sinner God has called out of your self-loathing and self-righteousness.

You are set free from needing a reputation... to be with and bump into those who are most in need. You do have a knowledge of God and have found in Him steadfast love for yourself and others.



*Artists unknown

