

Called By God

**A sermon by Rev. Dr. Gregory Young
Presented on Sunday, February 7, 2010**

Sermon:

It was about four or five years ago, Cindy and I were having dinner with a very dear friend of ours who now lives in the Durham, North Carolina area. In fact she is on staff at Duke University. She's a very dear friend, one that I had the privilege of serving on a church staff with several years ago. And so we were just sort of catching up with our dear friend and sharing stories. We started sharing stories of God's grace that we had witnessed while serving in a church together; the places where we sort of miraculously saw God moving in people's lives. It was not because of us, but we were privileged to witness it and to be present for that and we were sharing some of those stories. And then of course, as human beings are, we started sharing some of those not so pleasant stories from church life. The challenges and the struggles that accompany any work that we do in our lives but they do accompany ministry in the church – the times when personalities and opinions clash and the good work of the church sometimes comes to a grinding halt while we work out some of our differences as sisters and brothers. We were sharing some of these struggles and they had for me personally become a little bit of a burden.

And so after we had finished all of these stories, we're still toward the end of our dinner, my good friend looked at me and said, "Greg, if you had it to do all over again, what would you do? Would you still go into the ordained ministry?" Well I know I had a little smile on my face and I did not hesitate in my answer to my friend's question; I looked her in the eye and with all seriousness, I said to her, "If I had it to do all over again, knowing then as a young man what I know now, I would be an electrician." We did what you just did, we laughed. But then I felt that an explanation was needed because I wasn't being funny.

I shared with my friend how I know that I would enjoy being an electrician. I know I would enjoy it. I like to work with my mind and my hands. I like troubleshooting and solving problems. I enjoy drawing wiring diagrams and running new electrical circuits in the house. (Don't tell the inspectors in town by the way.) Plus, I felt that I would probably be a good enough electrician to make a living to provide for the needs of my family. My friend found this interesting and she said to me, "So, you really do not want to be an ordained minister."

I looked my friend in the eye again and I shared with her my call to ordained ministry. I reminded her that when I entered college I was enrolled in a curriculum that would train me to be an engineer. I was going to learn how to design and build nuclear power plants and hopefully land a job upon graduation with a utility company. I then shared with my friend how engineering and I had a mutual breakup my third semester – I didn't like it and it didn't like me, which usually amounts to poor grades. I tell some friends jokingly, I was on the other dean's list. And I thank God for it everyday. Because, during that time I did a lot of soul searching - I sought guidance from my pastor; I took advantage of career counseling that was offered at the university. And in taking a few different courses and in talking with a few people inside the church and outside the church I discovered that I had a call to ordained ministry. And so as I shared this, I looked at my friend and said, "You see - engineer, electrician, house painter, whatever – I was called by God to ordained ministry." And I concluded by saying if I had it to do all over again, she and I would still be having that same conversation in that same restaurant in Durham, North Carolina, because I believe no matter what career path I had chosen as a young man I would still be an ordained minister in Christ's church.

Think how different our lives would be if Peter, James, and John and the others who were at their side had not accepted Jesus' invitation to follow him. What would have happened to us? Where would we be today? Would we even be today? Would we have ever come together to form a community of God's grace? Would

we be Jewish, or Muslim, or Buddhist, or some other religion, or would we have no religious beliefs at all? If those whom Jesus called to follow him never accepted the invitation we more than likely would have never come together. We would've never met one another. However, because they said yes to that invitation from Jesus to follow him, we have come together and our lives are better for it. Our lives are much different than what they could have been without faith in Jesus Christ.

And not only have we come together, we believe that we are together for eternity.

Without Peter, James, John, the other nine, without all of those who heard the call of Jesus saying follow me and followed as faithful disciples, our lives would've never come together. But because we have come together, we now have this understanding that God calls us to follow Jesus. Not just me by virtue of my ordination, but all of us by virtue of baptism we are called to follow Jesus. And the decision as to whether we will follow or won't follow; whether we will follow close by or whether we will stand way, way back away from Jesus - that rests with each and every one of us. And it rests with our community of faith because by virtue of that baptism, our lives have been connected together in the one Lord, the one Savior, the One God who is God and Father of us all. And our lives have been claimed by God for God's purposes so that we no longer live on our own, but we also live together in a community that is shaped by the values and the love of God.

Holy Communion is a living reminder for us that just as Jesus offered his life that we might find life, we are to follow him even this far – to offer our lives in faith and obedience to the One who has become our life together. Each one of us is indispensable for the life and work of our church community. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer has written in his little book, *Life Together*, and I would recommend that little book to you. Bonhoeffer writes this, "In a Christian community everything depends upon whether each individual is an indispensable link in a chain. Only when even the smallest link is securely interlocked is the chain unbreakable..." We are invited by God to live-out our call to ministry within the

context of the body of Christ – the Church. We are called to find our place in that body. Some are called to be pastors and preachers, more of us are called to do the various tasks and duties and ministries and caring that make-up a local church community.

Concerning Jesus' call of Peter, James, and John and all the others, they were meant to be his followers. And if they hadn't said yes that day on the beach when the boat landed with all of those fish, they would've said yes at some other time, but they were the ones who were called and more than likely they couldn't hide from that call - just like I couldn't hide from my call in that college curriculum of engineering. Concerning your call and my call, to follow Jesus, by coming together and placing ourselves under the yoke of our Savior, we are doing what God most wants us to do – very simply, we're following the way of Jesus, and that is a good thing to do because it has transformed our lives and made all the difference for our living and it will transform the life of this world as we venture from these doors and these walls and allow that call to extend from us and reach others yet to hear it. In Jesus' name, thanks be to God. Amen.