

## GOD'S CALL IN THE WILD



**Scripture:**

**Genesis 1:1-5**

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, <sup>2</sup>the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. <sup>3</sup>Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. <sup>4</sup>And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup>God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

**Acts 19:1-7**

<sup>1</sup>While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. <sup>2</sup>He said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?” They replied, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” <sup>3</sup>Then he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They answered, “Into John’s baptism.” <sup>4</sup>Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.” <sup>5</sup>On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup>When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied — <sup>7</sup>altogether there were about twelve of them.

**This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!**



### GOD'S CALL IN THE WILD

Baptism. Today we remember the day our Lord was baptized by John in the water of the Jordan, and we remember how Paul baptized in the name of the Lord by laying his hands on Christ followers in Ephesus,

blessing them through the power of the Holy Spirit. Soon we will have a laying-on-of-hands ceremony, too.

Poor Apollos was a new Christian who needed supervision from Paul because he was teaching about Jesus but Apollos didn't

know the difference between baptism of repentance and baptism in the name of the Lord through the power of the Holy Spirit. Do you know the difference? It can be confusing.

### **DIFFERENCES IN BAPTISMS**

Dr. Jacob Myer is a professor at a seminary in Kansas. To understand the difference between baptism in John's ministry and baptism in accordance with the Lord Jesus, Myer explains that the baptism that these twelve Ephesian men received was only a partial baptism; they had in fact turned from their old way of being-in-the-world, but they had *not* yet been empowered to effect kingdom change for the good of the world.

Wild and earthy John the Baptist was focused on calling people to repent, washing and cleansing them of their sins in the water of the Jordan and setting them on the path towards Christ. And that was very important!

But when Christ came on the scene, his ministry emphasized peace, the love of God and love of your neighbor. So Paul combined these two approaches to baptism and said that the Holy Spirit inspires these loving actions as a response to God's grace given to us through baptism.

Dr. Myer quotes the theologian, Gustavo Gutiérrez, who said, "By preaching the gospel, by its sacraments, and by the charity of its members, the church proclaims and welcomes the gift of the kingdom of God at the heart of human history. The Christian community professes a 'faith which works through charity.' It is, or at least it ought to be, efficacious love, action, and commitment to the service of others."

The book of Acts describes such love at work in Paul's ministry in Ephesus, where he heals the sick and offers psychological relief for the afflicted demonstrating tangible acts of care.

### **OUR BAPTISM**

Most of us have been baptized as infants. Our parents, inspired by the Holy Spirit moving in their lives, made that decision for us. Since most of us don't recall the details of that day, there is a Baptism of our Lord Sunday today to recall our baptism, to remember what it was all about, to rejoice in it and to take seriously the "Call" that was in our baptism.

We were baptized by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ's own forever. And in that sacrament of baptism the Holy Spirit anoints us. Over time, as we understand what that means for our lives, we realize that the anointing contained a call for all of us to develop as Christ's disciples. As a result of developing into his disciples we are blessed with a closer awareness of having a personal relationship with God the Divine within and around us, the blessing inherent in discipleship.

### **REFLECTING CHRIST TO THE WORLD**

**The water of baptism anoints us  
and calls us to be Christ-like  
and to take seriously the role  
of disciple as we grow.**

Our identity as those baptized into Christ means our lives are to reflect Christ to the world. And every day when we awaken to receive the gift of life and breath once again, we are freshly called to act out our discipleship through love and charity, the promotion of peace, and healing.

Our Book of Order reminds us: "Baptism enacts and seals what the Word proclaims: God's redeeming grace offered to all people. Baptism is God's gift of grace and also God's summons to respond to that grace. Baptism calls to repentance, to faithfulness, and to

discipleship. Baptism gives the church its identity and commissions the church for ministry to the world."

### **CALLED TO RESPOND**

So how do we respond to this reminder that we are summoned or called to respond to God's gift of grace in baptism?

God calls us to respond to grace and to show in action our Christian identity in various ways during our lives. We are called by God constantly to love others by first embracing God's love within us. Then God allows us to use the gifts and talents we have been blessed with to uniquely respond to God's call to discipleship.

### **MY OWN CALL**

Remembering this inspired me to reflect upon my own "call story." I made the leap of faith to go to seminary after a long discernment process. Although I participated in a Presbyterian Church most of my life, I didn't hear a clear call from God to ministry until 1993. It was then I decided to inquire about attending seminary part-time while living in the Washington DC area. But after consulting one of our pastors at National Presbyterian Church and praying for discernment, we both felt I should wait. So I did wait - for ten years. Then came another stirring inside me that truly moved my soul one night when I was praying. Have you ever had an experience where you feel as if you are being pulled in a direction you can't resist?

### **A CALL FROM GOD**

A call from God doesn't always involve such a huge life change. It can be a small whisper to talk to someone in need of a friend about coming along with you to church so they too can have the support system you have here. Or the call might be a nudge to make time in your schedule for a

new mission to be involved with, such as becoming a church officer. The way to discern if the call is from God is to pray about it. The nudge might come out of the blue and seem wild and crazy, like John the Baptist calling people to repent and believe and be baptized. Those who responded to John's call in those days were looked upon as rebels and quite wild! Yet, they could feel God's presence in the midst of the call.

I recently re-read the part of Jack London's, *The Call of the Wild*, where he beautifully describes the "call" felt by the main character, Buck. He wrote: "Deep in the forest a call was sounding, and as often as he heard this call, mysteriously thrilling and luring, he felt compelled to turn his back upon the fire and the beaten earth around it, and to plunge into the forest, and on and on, he knew not where or why; nor did he wonder where or why, the call sounding imperiously, deep in the forest."

### **LISTEN**

In this New Year, I encourage you to quiet yourself every day for twenty minutes and open your mind up to God. Pray for God to lead you to where you are being called at this time in your life, you may hear or feel God leading you to a new call or revitalizing a familiar call from the past.

This New Year is a good time to evaluate what your call may be, and get involved with a new ministry of some kind. But you might be saying to yourself that it is too late for me. My time for answering God's call is past. I have too many problems.

**Carl Bard said, "Although no one can go back and make a brand new start, anyone can start from now and make a brand new ending."**

You still have time to answer God's call to respond with your life to God's great gift of grace. Karl Barth said, "Laughter is the closest thing to the grace of God." So maybe you are being called to bring laughter and joy into someone's life again or maybe for the first time.

Frederick Buechner said, "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

**No matter the season of life you are in, your baptism sealed you as Christ's own and you are still being called by the Holy Spirit to embrace God's love and show that love to those in need of it.**

Take time to pray this January about how you will live out your call in this day and at this time. You don't have to go to seminary to answer God's call but you can join the Wednesday night Great Courses New Testament Bible Study that starts next Wednesday and develop your discipleship of Jesus Christ more intentionally. Or you can come early on Sundays and attend the Bible Study of the lectionary scriptures for the week.

There are many options here at Church of the Roses for you. I am glad to meet and help you discern your call according to the spiritual gifts you have been given. It is good to ponder with another Christian to evaluate how the Holy Spirit may be leading you today. Amen

**Benediction:**

**Answer God's call no matter how wild it may seem, and honor Jesus with your life today and every day.**

**And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now and forever more. Amen**



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