

WORTHY TO BE CALLED AND SENT



Scripture:

Psalm 145:1-8

¹I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever. ²Every day I will bless you, and praise your name forever and ever. ³Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; his greatness is unsearchable.

⁴One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts. ⁵On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate. ⁶The might of your awesome deeds shall be proclaimed, and I will declare your greatness. ⁷They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness, and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.

⁸The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

Philippians 1:21-30

²¹For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. ²²If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which I prefer. ²³I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; ²⁴but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. ²⁵Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, ²⁶so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.

²⁷Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, ²⁸and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. ²⁹For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well—³⁰since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

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



“Grace Like Rain,” a powerful experience video was shown to the congregation to begin the sermon. We all have times we need to be reminded of God's amazing and restoring grace.

This video takes a moment to help us do exactly that.

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The week has been long for me, and I'm sure it has been long for Karen and the Bowles family anticipating Paul's memorial service yesterday. This church was overflowing as we celebrated Paul's wonderful life and peaceful death.

The apostle Paul was contemplating life and death in his letter to the people developing the church in Philippi, in the section of Greece called Macedonia. Paul was in jail again writing letters, but this time he was in Rome. Paul seems a bit tense in the beginning of this letter probably because he understood that he had been charged with sedition, a crime punishable by death.

The Romans viewed Paul as a rebel since he was preaching and teaching people to follow the way of Jesus Christ rather than bowing to the authority of their Emperor.

Paul trusted that the outcome of his life was in God's hands. So this letter contains his innermost thoughts as he weighs the benefits of death now or the benefits of being around longer to help the young churches. He shares that his preference is to "depart and be with Christ" in heaven.

JOY IN FAITH

But as the letter continues, he realizes that the Philippians still need him to help them develop their "Joy in Faith" in the church.

Joy in Faith. There is such joy in faith. I shared yesterday during our Paul's memorial service how Paul Bowles had such joy in his soul and a trusting faith. So he, like the Apostle Paul, had no fear of death. That is the result of having Joy in faith.

Joy in faith comes from knowing that you have a purpose on this earth and in this life. You are important to God and to the world. And, like the apostle Paul and all the disciples of Christ, you, too, are called to help others have "joy in faith."

**So how do we do this?
Apostle Paul basically says to live
your life in a manner worthy
of the gospel of Christ.
Stand united and firm in the Spirit,
and do not be afraid of what
others say or think about you.**

WORTHY

First, let's look at what it means to be "worthy" of the gospel of Christ. You were born of God, by God, and for God. You carry the Divine within you. You were made in the image of God. And since Christ came to show us the depth of God's love for each of us, and the healing power of forgiveness and grace, then you are worthy! We all are born worthy!

But to fulfill a calling by God, you must understand and accept your worthiness. You must never doubt you are worthy to be called, to be loved, to become what you were born to be, to be blessed by this calling, and to be sent out into a world that is hurting and in need of you to show them God's love in action.

UNITY IN THE CHURCH

The second step to answer the call to have joy in the faith and to spread that joy to others is to stand united and firm in the spirit.

When Paul is talking about unity in the church he says, be of "One Mind." Isn't that a great way to think about it? It reminds me of the saying, "Great minds think alike." Being of one mind is more than just being in agreement about something. When people are of one mind, they are automatically supportive of one another because they take the time to learn how the other is feeling. They walk a mile in their shoes. They listen to various points of view without getting defensive. The one mind doesn't operate from a selfish egotistical perspective but operates with the humble perspective of what is good for the group as a whole.

HUMILITY

A humble attitude promotes the gospel of Jesus Christ because people respect and listen to humble people who can relate interpersonally with others rather than a commander-type of leader.

A leadership resource called, MindTools, teaches that the word “Humility” has been called the most beautiful word in the English language. There are many benefits to practicing humility; “it improves relationships across all levels, it reduces anxiety, it encourages more openness and humility enhances one's self-confidence. The author of this article who is a leadership educator, believes, “Humility opens a window to a higher self.”

Jesus preached humility often! The word is mentioned sixty-three times in the Bible. But Paul had some trouble with humility. He had to work at it since he was very intelligent, from a wealthy family and well educated. Before his conversion to Christianity, Paul was a highly respected Pharisee and prided himself on his status among the Jews. So it is no wonder Rome felt threatened by his activities, preaching and teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

THE GOSPEL OF GOD'S LOVE

I wonder if Paul could have avoided jail if he had demonstrated the gospel of God's love by holding up Free Hug signs in Jerusalem. That would have been a news-worthy way to teach God's love in action, don't you think? Just imagine, Paul standing in the Jerusalem plaza, offering silent hugs to everyone who needed one.

In the next chapter in Philippians, Paul repeats the teaching from today's passage with a different order. He says, “Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ²then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit.

Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.”

Such great advice to follow. In today's passage to the Philippians, Paul is instructing the church family to be humble and in one mind; he is emphasizing community, unity versus division, togetherness versus separation.

Jesus taught humility for the purpose of drawing us closer to him in relationship. Humility makes one attractive to others; when you act prideful then people get repelled.

A PLACE TO BELONG

Christ knew God's children need relationships and a place to belong.

The image on the bulletin cover shows that first you are called to belong. When you belong to a group of like-minded people, you not only feel peaceful you also accomplish more together to help the world. All of us need to be in healthy relationships with one another. And Christ's humble way with people promoted relationship building.

We are called to imitate his humble ways to get along and do more to share our joy in the faith with others.

Now for the last step to help others understand the joy of faith in Jesus Christ, one must not worry about those who “oppose you.” In other words, do not let the negative thinking, the gossip, the ridicule of your loving behavior dissuade you from following the path of Christ. When you won't join in on the gossip, and you clearly don't enjoy the bully-like behavior, you might be made fun of and teased. (This happens not just on the school grounds but in all age groups.)

FULLFILLING YOUR CALL

If you stand up for the weak, the homeless, the hungry and the vulnerable as Christ called you to do, then you are showing that you are worthy of the gospel, and you are fulfilling your call from God to share your joy in faith with others.

It might seem scary at first to step out of your comfort zone, but it really feels good in your soul to reach out to those no one else wants to touch. After you conquer the fear of what others might think, you reap the benefits. God will grant you grace when you imitate Christ, our humble servant.

First Peter 5:5 says, "Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

As the video reminded us, God's grace is the greatest gift you can receive. For God's grace washes us clean because it contains forgiveness, love, courage, and healing power.

So to recap: the three steps to share Joy in Faith are to:

- Trust that you were made to be worthy from the moment of your birth.
- Humble yourself in a Christ-like way which enables you to be in unity with others.
- Have courage, and advocate for justice without fear of what others think. Just be concerned about what Christ thinks, and be of his same mind.

You are called to do these things! And like the church in Philippi, we as a church are called:

To be loved,
To become,
To belong,
To be blessed,
To be sent out into a world in need.

On this Kick-off Sunday, do you think we can do it? Can we answer the call to go and humbly love?

Well then let's show the world we are taking a step today to answer the call of God to love our neighbor. Come with me for a few minutes to Montgomery Village right after the service. We are going to parade over and stand in the middle of the shops and silently hold up these signs offering free hugs to symbolically show our church humbly shares the love of God. If you don't want to offer silent "Free Hugs," you can just come along for the parade or hand out our new Welcome Brochures.

God has a plan for this church to accept the call and go out our doors to carry God's grace to all inside and outside our church family. We all are worthy to accomplish God's purposes until our time has come to rest in Jesus.

Benediction:

You are being called and sent to this local community and around the world. So with courage, humility and the mind of Christ, go!

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



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September 21, 2014**