

SERMON

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Immanuel Lutheran Church, Bartlett, IL

Epiphany 2, A - January 18, 2026

Isaiah 49:1-7 Psalm 40:1-11 1 Corinthians 1:1-9 John 1:29-42

God's CALLING people

- is a theme that runs through all our Scripture readings today.

Our Catechism reminds us of the Scriptural teaching

- that each one of us is “called by the Gospel”--
- as part of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

When we talk about there being a “call” in everyday life,

- it normally refers to a phone call.

When there is a phone call--

- first of all there is a ring--
- or a sound of some kind to alert us
- that someone has something to say to us.

When the Holy Spirit calls US by the Gospel,

- something similar happens.

There's a kind of ring in our souls.

- We are alerted that God has something to tell us--
- that He knows where we are in every sense
- and is communicating with us.

Now as you would assume,

- Satan does not like that sort of communication going on
- and does everything he can to create STATIC,
- using all kinds of distraction
- or sometimes, just plain stubborn doubts.

So the message of the call

- is often hard for us sinners to understand or receive,
- but instead is garbled--
- or even completely cut off.

It's much like what happens with a cell phone call

- if it goes out of range
- or when a phone's battery is out of power.

Also, there is something in our own human nature

- that causes us to run away from the call of the Gospel-ring.

Recall how Adam and Eve hid from God in the garden

- as God called **them**.
- “WHERE ARE YOU?” He called.

So the communication God wants to have with US

- is sometimes broken up
- or even lost by our own actions.

As sinners,

- we **ALL** have a communication problem with the holy God
- by the nature of things.

Yet God does not give up on us.

- Thankfully, God keeps calling.
- God has been so determined to talk
- that He sent His beloved Son for a personal visit
- in spite of the difficulties and pain that involved....

In the Bible readings today,

- we heard from Isaiah as he described his work as a prophet.
- “The Lord **CALLED** me from the womb,”
- At the center of what Isaiah was called to do
- was to predict the coming of the Messiah,
- especially how He would take our sins upon Himself--
- the sins of us who had wandered far from God like lost sheep.

And we heard the words of Paul to the Corinthians,

- how **he** was
- “**CALLED** by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus”.
- And then how his hearers were

“**CALLED** to be saints

- together with **ALL those who in EVERY PLACE**
- call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...”--
- all believers.

- **Those words include us!**

- And then this wonderful promise:
- “God is faithful, by whom **YOU** were
- **CALLED** into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

In the Gospel for this day,

- we hear how Jesus,
- who had been anointed with the Holy Spirit at His Baptism,
- began **CALLING** His first disciples,
- one by one,
- drawing them to Himself.
- “Follow Me.”

It is significant that our Catechism

- uses very personal words
- in the explanation to the Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed:

“I believe that the Holy Spirit has called **ME** by the Gospel.”--

- It’s NOT just that God calls some special people like St. Paul.
- He calls **ME**.

Calls ME to be a **disciple**--

- not merely to be on the books of a church--
- calls ME to be a genuine follower of Christ,
- through thick and thin.

The catechism continues :

To enable me to follow,

- the Holy Spirit **gathers** me to be together with other Christians
- and “**enlightens** me with His gifts,
- **sanctifies** and **keeps** me in the one true faith.”

Almighty God IS active in EACH believer’s life.

In today’s Epistle we hear that those whom God has called

“are not lacking in **any spiritual gift**.”

In writing about Baptism,

-Paul writes that our bodies themselves

- are **TEMPLES of the Holy Spirit**. (1 Corinthians 6:19)

We are not like some speck of insignificant cosmic dust in God’s eyes.

- God is involved in EACH of our lives
- and intends to **USE US** for His purposes
- as followers of His Son.

Later in chapter 12 of Corinthians, Paul writes,

“The Spirit’s presence is shown in some way in EACH PERSON for the good of all.... As He wishes, He gives a different gift to EACH PERSON.”

Each Christian, each believer,

- ALL those the baptized into Christ.
- There is no need for any of us to have a low spiritual self-esteem.

I wonder how many church members there are

- who go through the motions of being Christian
- without any real joy in
- or appreciation of the activity of the Holy Spirit
- in their lives.

Understanding that the Spirit IS working in us

- has many practical applications.
- One is in the local congregation:

In a congregation

- where members are conscious of their calling by the Holy Spirit
- and are letting the Holy Spirit work through them--
- truly wonderful things happen.

It’s NOT that everyone is a pastor.

- The secret is that the members of the body of Christ in that place
- are each doing what the Spirit enables that person to do

- for the common good.

Again the words of Paul to the Corinthians:

“The Spirit’s presence is shown in some way in EACH PERSON for the good of all.... As he wishes, He gives a different gift to each person.”

- And we witness by using the VARIOUS gifts the Spirit bestows:.

Some may be....

- great pray-ers,
- others, great administrators,
- or teachers,
- or doing the necessary serving tasks
 - of keeping our meeting place orderly
 - and clean
 - and in good repair.
 - and conformed to legal requirements--
 - or organizing and cooking for great fellowship events.

Some may have the gift of

- giving itself,
- or of hospitality,
- or encouraging
- or having a heart for those in need.

Some may have

- great wisdom;
- others, needed knowledge.
- still others, great faith that inspires all those around.

We witness this very thing happening right here

- in our Voters and other meetings.

And there is one more practical implication of this teaching--

- a more personal one.

William Barclay, the highly respected Bible commentator,

- once wrote that there are two great days in a person's life--
“the day we are born and the day we discover WHY.”

A person discovers WHY, when drawn to see

- that God **is** involved with that person--
- that God has CALLED her or him to faith for a purpose.

Such a person will know a deep inner contentment

- and unshakable peace.

It's a contentment that flows from knowing

- that his or her life has
- a divine, caring, guiding hand behind it,

And there is an additional deep, joy-filled peace

- in knowing that it's not left up to us
- to make of ourselves something spiritually significant.

Again in the words of Paul,

“We are HIS workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for a life of good works.”

That means that we can let go of trying to be

- who we are not intended to be.

We can be accepting of our place in life right now,

- right where we are,
- as having God's own hand directing it.

Our job is truly to bloom where we are planted.

We see that attitude in John the Baptist.

He knew his work was to prepare the way for the Messiah.

- He willingly stepped aside as the center of attention
- when Jesus began His ministry.

John encouraged his own disciples to leave him in order to follow Jesus.

“I must decrease and He must increase.”

John knew and accepted his place in God's plans.....

Knowing we are called by God IS important

Let's resolve not to let any interference garble that message for us.

- Because knowing that you have been called

- is central to the meaning of our following Christ...,
- just as the specific “Divine of a pastor is central to his life.

Then, as my mother used to tell me,

“Keep your eyes peeled, Jimmy!”

Keep YOUR eyes peeled for how the Spirit CAN use YOU....

- and IS using you, already now....
- and what it means that you are now the Holy Spirit’s temple.
- Don’t miss out on all that God Himself so urgently wants to tell you.

In conclusion,

- if you, as a baptized Christian,
- are EVER feeling at loose ends spiritually,
- maybe disappointed in yourself,
- missing knowing hope and joy,
- maybe confused
- and wondering what it all means,
- and what to do about it all--
- begin by answering the phone! Amen.