

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
Sermon Text: Jeremiah 1:4-10
Related text: Psalm 71:1-6
Date preached: February 3, 2013

In the church we have often used the word “call” to speak of an individual’s call to the office of ordained ministry. While that is certainly appropriate I wonder if we sometimes lose sight of God’s call of individuals to service in roles outside of the pastoral office.

Over the past two weeks we’ve heard 1 Corinthians 12. We’ve heard that “Jesus is Lord”. Under his Lordship we are united together into one body. Each member of the body is bestowed particular gifts that when used serve the whole body of Christ or family of God.

The point is to say that while God does indeed call individuals to the office of Word and Sacrament those individuals are but one part of the body of Christ. This also means that there is a place in the body of Christ for your gifts to be used.

Not only does God give to us gifts for the building up of the body of Christ, God doesn’t take “no” for an answer. Jeremiah is a young boy when God calls him to be a prophet. Jeremiah hears this call and offers

up an excuse. “Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.”

God responds by removing Jeremiah’s excuse. “Behold, I have put my words in your mouth.” And now that this is accomplished God commissions Jeremiah. You’ve got the job. No experience necessary. No excuses accepted.

This call pattern is very much present throughout Scripture. I have also heard this pattern in the lives of many lay people throughout the church. We hear God call us to a particular service. And like Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and countless men and women throughout the history of the church we come up with excuses that God has heard before.

I’m too young. I’m too old. I wouldn’t know what to say. I’m not smart enough. I don’t have time. I won’t get my way.

Unfortunately, some of our excuses shield a greater issue that we may not want to admit. The greatest issue is a lack of love.

You see for all the gifts that God has given us for building up the body of Christ the most significant one is found in this chapter. 1 Cor. 12:31 reads, “But

strive for the greater gifts and I will show you still a more excellent way.”

The most excellent way is love. In fact, God created us to love. It is His command and desire that we love him. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. And love your neighbor as yourself.”

For the Christian love is not an option, it is a way of life. To love God necessarily leads us to love our neighbors. Our neighbors include: the people with whom we most disagree, the individual who does not want us to do well at work or is eager to take credit for your work, to the woman on welfare, to the person who doesn't know Jesus.

Yet it is Jesus who was born to save the enemies of God. The enemies of God are those who sin. To quote a phrase from Walter Kelly, “We have met the enemy, and he is us.”

From the fifth chapter of Romans, we hear the good news that “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God

by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.”

On the cross Christ brought us back to God. It is through Christ that we have the promise of everlasting life. It is Christ who has fulfilled the prophecy of Psalm 71.

Through the righteousness of Christ, we have been delivered and set free. Through Christ, God delivers us from the hand of the wicked, from the clutches of the evildoer and the oppressor. From before our birth, God is our strength and from that strength, we are equipped to love.

Loving our neighbor is the response of God’s love first given to us. Our love for God and for our neighbor is at the heart of discipleship.

It is by the power of the Holy Spirit that we are prepared to live as disciples of our Lord.

For the most loving thing we can do is to share the good news that Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.