

January 14, 2024
Second Sunday after the Epiphany
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

1 Corinthians 6:12-20 (1 Samuel 3:1-10; John 1:43-51)

YOU HAVE BEEN CALLED.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Since 1984, the third Sunday of January has been designated as the National Sanctity of Human Life Day, a day to bring awareness to the deceptions of the devil that endanger human life. That is next Sunday, but because of today's appointed epistle text, we're observing Life Sunday today.

Prior to Christ Jesus entering His creation as the Word become flesh, God spoke to His people of old by the prophets. (cf: Hebrews 1:1–2) In our Old Testament text, it was a time when God's people had little interest in the truth of God's Word so it was rare that God would send His Word.

“Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” (Judges 17:6)

Everyone – including the priests serving at the tabernacle. Eli was a priest serving in the sanctuary of the Lord at Shiloh in the period of the judges. Scripture says that Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, who were also priests, were worthless men who did not know the Lord. (cf: 1 Samuel 2:12) They'd steal the people's sacrificial meat offerings and would have their way with the women serving at the temple. (cf: 1 Samuel 2:13–17, 22)

God would raise up a faithful priest who would serve the Lord according to His will. (cf: 1 Samuel 2:35) The boy, Samuel, was training in the tabernacle under Eli. As he slept one night, the Lord repeatedly called out to him. (cf: 1 Samuel 3:4–8) Finally the Lord revealed Himself. He came and stood – calling out to Samuel. And Samuel finally replied:

“Speak, for your servant hears.” (1 Samuel 3:10)

These are words that you and I would do well to pray often. Whenever you read God's Word or prepare for worship, pray, *“Speak, for your servant hears.”* Because even today, God still calls, He still speaks, and He still reveals Himself, albeit by different means, but His Word is every bit as valid and effective. Just as the writer to the Hebrews tells us:

“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...” (Hebrews 1:1–2)

When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.” (Galatians 4:4–5)

We hear in our Gospel text that, having been anointed for His earthly ministry of salvation in His Baptism, Jesus wastes no time in getting to work to seek and save the lost. In the culture of the day, religious students would *seek out* the rabbi under whom they wished to study. But this isn't the case with Jesus. Time is short and eternity is long. He knows the depravity of the human soul. He knows that men can neither choose to be born again, nor resuscitate themselves unto new life. He doesn't wait for disciples to choose Him. He doesn't wait for fallen spiritually dead sinners see the light and make a decision to follow Him. He goes to Galilee and begins to call His first disciples. He doesn't try to persuade or coerce or deceive. No. Jesus simply commands. His Word creates a new reality. After all, He is the Word who in the beginning made all things. He finds Philip and says to him:

“Follow me.” (John 1:43)

At Jesus' call Philip immediately believes. Philip finds Nathanael and says:

“We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” (John 1:45)

But Nathaniel wasn't as easily convinced. He's skeptical because what good could possibly come out of Nazareth? Why would the Messiah come from someplace so unremarkable and outside the mainstream of Jewish life? Nathanael thought he knew better. His reaction to Jesus is the typical reaction of the sinner who wants to remain in charge of his own life. But the Holy Spirit was working behind the scenes, softening Nathanael's hardened heart. In hope of seeing the Messiah with his own eyes, when Philip said to him, ***“Come and see,”*** Nathanael followed. St John records:

“Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, ‘Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!’⁴⁸ Nathanael said to him, ‘How do you know me?’ Jesus answered him, ‘Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.’” (John 1:47–48)

Jesus reveals Himself as the all-knowing and ever-present God – and Nathaniel believes. In His great love and mercy, God calls the unrighteous into His kingdom. He called, Samuel, He called Philip and Nathaniel, and He called you. And just as sure as God knew Samuel before he was formed in the womb of his barren mother... just as sure as Jesus knew Nathaniel before he was sitting under the fig tree, God knows you.

God called you either in the holy waters of Baptism or in the preaching of His Gospel and has given you the Holy Spirit. In the verse just prior to our epistle text this morning, St. Paul writes:

“... you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” (1 Corinthians 6:11)

In Baptism God has made you a new creation and clothed you with the holiness of Christ's righteousness. As I said last week, Baptism is a big deal. But unfortunately you and I are tempted to use our baptismal grace as license to sin... a license to make poor life choices. And St. Paul makes it clear that living in sin is not compatible with the Christian life. (cf: 1 Corinthians 6:9-10) He writes:

“All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be enslaved by anything.” (1 Corinthians 6:12)

Yes, in Christ Jesus, you're free from the Law and under God's Grace. (cf: Romans 6:14) But unfortunately in Christian freedom, you and I have the freedom to make poor and destructive choices. In your freedom, you can become slaves to your own will rather than God's. In consideration of Life Sunday, this slavery results in obesity, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, diabetes and depression. I'm guilty too. I need to exercise and lose weight.

The body of a believer isn't simply a carcass to be mistreated and tossed aside when you leave this veil of tears. It's a gift created by the Maker of heaven and earth, purchased with the precious blood and innocent suffering of Christ, and made holy by the washing of the water with the Word. (cf: Ephesians 5:26) It's the body that will be raised from the dead and reunited with your soul on the Last Day.

But in our epistle, St. Paul is addressing a greater evil and we still face it today. If you don't know, in Paul's day, prostitution was legal. It was also socially acceptable for men to have sexual relations with boys and men. (cf: Lockwood, 1 Corinthians, Concordia Commentary, 213) Paul writes:

“Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food”—and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.” (1 Corinthians 6:13)

Food and the stomach are important – but neither is eternal. But the body is quite different. While the stomach is merely a hollow place inside the body, the body itself is a temple in which the Holy Spirit dwells. Your body, soul, and Spirit are all gifts from God. They are integral to Christian spiritual life. (cf: Romans 12:1) But sin destroys both body and soul.

“Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.” (1 Corinthians 6:18)

Sexual immorality is usually defined as any and every kind of sexual activity outside of marriage. But strictly speaking... biblically speaking... there is no such thing as premarital sex. (cf: Lockwood, 1 Corinthians, Concordia Commentary, 218, fn. 35) When two people join together in sexual intercourse, in a mysterious way the two become one flesh, the one flesh union which is at the heart of Biblical marriage. (cf: Genesis 2:24)

“Casual sex’ is anything but casual. Your body which has been consecrated by God as a temple of His Holy Spirit in Baptism, which has been bought for a price, which is destined for resurrection, is torn from its spiritual union with Christ and is joined in an unholy union in any sexual act besides that between husband and wife. It's the first step down the slippery slope sinful life choices. Believing that one has personal autonomy over their body is the typical reaction of the sinner who wants to remain in charge of his own life. So, where has sinful life choices gotten us?

- The number of U.S. adults cohabiting with a partner continues to rise, especially among those 50 and older. (<https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2019/11/06/the-landscape-of-marriage-and-cohabitation-in-the-u-s/>)
- Sexually transmitted diseases are rapidly rising – disproportionately affecting young people under the age of 25, racial and ethnic minority groups, and gay or bisexual men. (<https://www.cdc.gov/nchhstp/newsroom/fact-sheets/std/std-us-2021.html>)

- Four in every ten babies are born to unmarried women. (<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/sosmap/unmarried/unmarried.htm>) That's after you subtract that 2 of every 10 children who are knowingly conceived are lost to abortion. (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/185286/legal-abortions-per-100-live-births-in-the-us-since-2000/>)
- Once personal autonomy over your body trumps the sanctity of life, euthanasia and physician assisted suicide become viable, yet sinful, options.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, flee from sinful poor life decisions. Flee from sexual immorality. Warn your sons and daughters and friends and neighbors:

"... do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

The all-knowing and ever-present God that revealed Himself to Samuel and Nathaniel, intimately knows you. And while you were still a sinner, Christ died for you. (cf: Romans 5:8) God called and manifested Himself to Samuel and Nathaniel in a spectacular ways, but your heavenly Father has called and revealed Himself to you in a supernatural way.

He called you in the washing of the water with the Word. At the font He joined you into Jesus' death and resurrection. (cf: Romans 6:3-5) You were connected to Jesus and made part of His body the Christian Church. In His holy absolution He forgives you of all your sins, poor life choices, disrespect for life, and sexual immorality. In the preaching of His Word, Christ reveals Himself to you as the Word become flesh, God's own Son, crucified for your sins and raised for your justification. In His Holy Supper, Christ Jesus reveals Himself to you in His body and blood. By this mysterious means He unites you to His people of all times and places in the *koinonia*, the fellowship, and participation of the body and blood of Christ. St Paul writes:

"Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." (1 Corinthians 10:17)

You are not your own. You were bought with a price. Not with gold or silver, but with Jesus' holy precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death. As a child of your heavenly Father, for the sake of Jesus, you live in Christian freedom. And Christian freedom is the freedom to live by the power of the Holy Spirit in accord with God's Law, serving God with your whole being – including your body. (cf: Romans 6:1-23; 12:1) And by the power of the same Holy Spirit, you are strengthened to flee from sin and live a Christian life serving and loving your neighbor just as God in Christ serves and loves you.

"For [you] are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that [you] should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10)

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, Amen.