

First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham
The Spirit at Work: Calling
The Rev. Dr. John Judson
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Acts 9:1-20

I loved baseball. As a kid I loved to play baseball, read about baseball and dream about baseball. What that meant was the one of the most exciting times of the year was when the season would arrive, my mom would sign me up and I would go to tryouts. I have no idea if getting into Little League is the same today as it was then, but there would be a date set for all of those who wanted to play to come to try out. We would run the bases. We would bat. We would field. And the whole time the coaches and assistant coaches would be taking notes and chatting. Among the coaches were those who were major league coaches and those who were minor league coaches. Then there would be the wait. I would then begin the process of listening for the phone to ring with a coach on the other end calling to tell my mom which team had chosen me. Let me clear that I had accepted early on that I was a minor leaguer. But that didn't matter. All that mattered was that call saying, its time to get your uniform and come play. Any of you ever waited for that kind of a call; a call saying you have been selected? A call saying you have gotten the college acceptance; have gotten the job? It is exciting isn't it? What I hope for this morning is that before we are done, you will be just as excited for a different kind of call as you were for those. But in order to understand how this works, we need to remember three words, "to", "by" and "for". Yes we are to remember two-by-four

First is the word "to". We are called to a community; to a family. When God calls us, it is never intended to be me and Jesus. As someone once said, there are no Lone Ranger Christians. When God calls us desiring a relationship, it is also God's desire for people to be in relationship with one another. This is so because we were not made to be alone. We were created for community. This is why when we baptize an adult or an infant, we say that they are now part of God's worldwide family. Again, we can see this is our story this morning. Jesus has called Paul (known by his Jewish name, Saul) but does not tell him everything he needs to know. Instead the Spirit then calls to a man named Ananias and tells him to go and welcome Saul. Ananias is not happy about this considering Paul had been on the way to put Ananias and his friends in prison. But Ananias goes and does two things. First, he calls Paul brother, meaning if Jesus had called Saul then Saul was Ananias's brother. Second, he baptizes Saul and by so doing brings him into the family. This is one of those wonderful things about God's call that it calls us to a community that will love us, support us, guide us and sometimes correct us. What that means for us here this morning is that not only has God called us to be in relationship with God, but God desires that we be in relationship with each other. God calls us "to" a family.

Second is the word “by”, meaning we are called by God. When I say God, I mean it can be God, it can be Jesus, or it can be the Spirit. Regardless of which does the calling, it is God who calls us into relationship with God. This is one of the great themes of the Bible that God desire us not only to be in family but to be in relationship with God’s own self. And because God desires to be in relationship with us, then God is always calling us, drawing us, silently working within us. We can see how this works in story after story in the Bible. In the Garden of Eden God can’t find Adam and Eve and so calls to them. God calls Abram and Sarah. God calls Moses out of a burning bush. The Spirit calls to Jesus after his baptism and sends him to the wilderness. Jesus calls disciples as he begins his ministry. And in our story this morning Ananias makes it clear that it is Jesus who called Saul and Jesus who asked him, Ananias, to be the agent of the call. As an aside, I realize that often when we think about being called, we think of dramatic stories, but what we need to understand is that this is not the way God usually calls us. God can call us through a deep felt need that perhaps something is missing in our lives. God can call us through the stories in the Bible. God can call us through family, friends, or perhaps even a sermon. Regardless, of where we sense the call, scripture, friend, an inner need, it is God who initiates the relationship.

Finally, the word “for”. We are called “for” a purpose. This is where many of us grind to a halt in our examination of being called. We stop here because we have been taught that being called for a purpose means being called to a particular religious position, such as pastor, or maybe even elder...though many elders would not think so. But the fact is that being called to a religious position is simply a subset of the purpose to which we are called, because the purpose to which we are called is to bless the world. Let me say that again. Our purpose in being called by God to a community is to bless the world. This means that each of us has been called to this purpose...and we can express this purpose in hundreds of ways. We can bless the world at school or at work by how we treat others. We can bless the world in our homes through how we rear our children and how we pray for others. We can bless the world through our giving, our forgiveness, our compassion and our understanding. And the ways we bless can and do change over the course of our lives. How we bless as children is different from how we bless as youth, then adults and onward. God calls us to a family for a purpose.

My challenge to you for this week is simple...enjoy your call. Enjoy knowing you are part of a family. Enjoy knowing you are known by God. Enjoy knowing that you have a purpose in life. Then as you get ready each morning for the coming day, simply say, “God, thank you for calling me with your to-by-four” and then let that reality shape your day.