

Four years ago to the day, Protestant churches around the world celebrated the 500th anniversary of the founding of Protestantism. On October 31, 1517, an Augustinian monk, whose studies in Pauline theology led him to challenge the Roman Catholic Church, called for a debate of 95 doctrines or theses. He didn't get his debate then; in fact, the debate came two years later, and at that time, he only argued thirteen points, the last was to be a late entry and not one of the original 95. But in all cases, Martin Luther was a man who lived up to his calling.

So often we hear the word, *call*, in the church and we think of someone called into the ministry of Word and Sacrament. Our Presbyterian polity describes the relationship between a pastor and a congregation, a call. And, if you come from a tradition that puts primary emphasis on personal salvation, like the Baptists or Pentecostals, then perhaps you think of a call as going to the front of the church during a worship service.

These are valid understandings of call, but Paul, in his *Letter to the Ephesians*, has in mind both a broader and a narrower sense of calling. Understand that the letters attributed to Paul the apostle were written not to clergy, not even exclusively to those people who organized and maintained the house churches scattered around the eastern edges of the Mediterranean Sea. Rather, Paul was writing to every Christian who attended worship services in those house

churches, to every Christian, young and old, who professed that Jesus the Christ was their Lord and Savior. Paul wrote to every believer, every saint, every Christian brother and sister, that every one of them had received a calling from God, and that their responsibility was to live up to their calling, "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

How well are you living up to your calling? Did you even realize that God was calling you to live a life worthy of the gospel? Or, did you sidestep that part, transferring God's call to the pastor, or to the elders on Session, or to anyone else, so that you don't have to deal with all of that? One of the things I see in Christianity in the United States is the trajectory taken that puts so much emphasis on personal salvation that we forget that each believer is a member of the Body of Christ, part of a whole that cannot grow unless the other members grow along with you.

Paul reminds the Ephesians of that when he notes that "[t]here is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, through all, and in all." We need to be reminded of that from time to time. Martin Luther and John Calvin didn't really want to break from the Roman Catholic Church; they sought to reform it. Unfortunately, the idea of reform was not in the vocabulary of the cardinals and the pope at that time.

Still, these two men lived out their calling, by calling others to return to the Scriptures, to read and study the Bible for themselves, to pray directly to the Triune God and not let others mediate or go between. Calvin and Luther used their gifts to help God call others to live into the gospel life. What gifts are you using to do something similar?

We are reminded that each of us are given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. This grace is God's forgiveness and understanding when we muck it up. Part of God's grace covers those times when we try new things and they don't turn out as expected. Part of God's grace covers the faux pas we inadvertently make, like forgetting an appointment, or putting the dishes in the wrong cabinet at church, or sitting in a pew where so-and-so's family always sits every Sunday (even when that family's last member died ten years ago) It is because of this grace which Christ gives that allows us to bear one another in love – that helps us exercise the gifts He gave to us for the building up the one Body of Christ because we are to extend that grace to others. Do you know what gifts you have? Do

extend that grace to others. Do you know what gifts you have? Do you know what God has called you to serve and work in the church? Are you living up to that calling?

When I talk about ministry and mission I mean two distinctive things. I may have said this before: mission is what Christians do to spread the gospel and share God's love, grace, mercy, and hope to others beyond the walls of the congregation. It can be in the form of

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proclaiming this Good News with words, or it can be expressed in action — helping collect hygiene kits, rebuilding homes after a disaster, feeding and clothing the needy in our community, collecting pennies to be gathered with other churches' offerings to do mission across the presbytery, the nation, the world.

My working definition of ministry is drawn from this morning's passage in the *Letter to the Ephesians*. Paul wrote that "[t]he gifts [Christ] gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the 'work of service,' for building up the Body of Christ..." "To equip the saints" is, for me, the work of ministry or service within a congregation, so that all the members can live up to their calling.

That calling to mission and ministry could be to work as a missionary or a church planter away from your home congregation. Or, it may be to invite others to hear the gospel hope and story, sharing your own faith-story as an evangelist. Or, it may be to teach others or to care for others, so that they are nurtured spiritually and physically, intellectually and emotionally, and can grow into their own gifts, living out their own call from God.

As sister-congregations formed and bound together in Christ, I urge you to seek out God's call, discern the gifts given, use them for the building up of the Body of Christ, equip the saints sitting beside you and those who will come in these doors. Grow up into maturity of

faith that is the living witness to the one faith, the one hope, the one Body, the one Spirit, the one baptism of our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ, who is the head of the Church.

Let us pray: Holy and gracious Father God of all, we come in praise and in prayer for Your good gifts. As You call us to use these gifts, to be equippers of our fellow believers, help us to live up to our callings. By Your Spirit, give us the wisdom to discern Your will and our identity in Christ which then leads us to share Your Good News, to be agents of Your gracious love, and to invite others to live in unity in Christ, our Lord. Amen.