

*Lord, have mercy upon us in this moment that the Word read would be Your Word proclaimed, and the Word proclaimed would illumine our hearts with your truth, that we may know better your way and your will for our lives - all for the glory of Christ's name, Amen.*

I have to confess... I've spent a lot of time looking for a needle in a haystack. 'Consider your call...' writes Paul to the Corinthians; 'Consider your call...' says Paul, to you and to me. I can't speak for you, but as for me, I've spent more than a few moments, "considering my call." Actually, that sounds too good – I'll be straight and retranslate: I've spent a lot of time worrying about my call... waiting for my burning bush – hoping for my time on Mt. Sinai when all is made right by God's gracious gift of clarity. I think it all started at an early age with my cheek in the church lady's hand, "tell me little honey, what do you want to be when you grow up?" Later, too old to let anyone pinch my cheek, the question evolved into, "What are you going to do with your life young man?" In college and in ministry the question was baptized and spiritualized, "What special plan does God have for your life? Have you discerned your call?" Different words, same question - at every stage I've been conditioned for a search... expected to find my needle, my work, my call in God's kingdom. And then I stumble upon this morning's lectionary text, 1 Corinthians 1:26 where Paul writes, "Consider your call brothers and sisters..." and I grow quiet. I think, if Paul knew his immediate audience (me) he might have written something else... something like, 'consider something *other* than your call brother... or, slow down little man – take a breather, chill out. Just keep reading my letter and you'll see that a call is not something you have to find or something you create... it is something God has already created. You may still find yourself standing at the brink of black, peering into a dark, formless future – but listen carefully," writes Paul, "God speaks from within the darkness calling you toward himself; calling you from light and sight into darkness and faith." But what's the call, where's the needle? "Slow down child, I'll get to that. Just know, I don't expect you to come up with the answer but want you to realize that the answer has already been given... it's not within you... but before you in this passage and in my proclamation.

So what's in this passage? Paul asks the Corinthians to consider their call... and what's so cool, Paul doesn't expect the Corinthians to come up with their own answer to

his question. In fact, a big reason Paul wrote this letter was to stop the Corinthians from coming up with so many of their own answers. And so Paul defines the call... lays it out in black and white. It is not a matter for consideration – but a matter of truth and proclamation.

He writes – we read, ‘Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise, not many powerful, not many of noble birth but God chose what is foolish, weak, low and despised - so that no one might boast. For God is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption; as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.’

And so, consider your own call – brothers and sisters at Princeton Seminary. Many of you ARE wise by human standards, many ARE intellectually powerful and financially of “noble birth.” Yet God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are... And that’s good news... good news because it is absolutely NOT about who you are, what you can do, or what you have... for we read that God and God alone is the source of our life in Christ Jesus.

Okay, perhaps we learned this in first grade Sunday school... but good lessons need to be repeated - the lesson that it is not our wisdom, or power or pedigree that put us onto the path of God’s precious grace. Rather, it is the cross: Jesus crucified – Christ resurrected. It’s a crazy concept to those who are perishing, but to us – those of us here and now – who have been called and who are being saved it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. Paul wanted to remind the Corinthians that the wisdom of God Almighty was shown forth in the crucified Christ... that it is Jesus who is the true source of our real life together; Jesus who is our greatest wisdom – The Christ who is our only righteousness; The Savior who began a good work in us, and Our Lord who carries our sanctification onto completion. Finally, and most certainly, it is the Lord Jesus Christ – who is IN FACT and THROUGH FAITH our sure hope for redemption in this life and the next.

Even so, we find the question of our call carrying us to the brink of black... but that is where the narrow way travels - to the edge of life where all becomes dark and faith becomes real. Friends, faith forms the substance of your call – you are called to faith – and, according to 1 Corinthians 1, you are called to proclaim Christ crucified with your words and with your life. Paul asked his readers to consider their call in the midst of what? In the midst of a discussion on Christ Crucified. The point, I think, is not to look for something more. What more could we hope to find? And, it is not to wait for a personal epiphany that will spell it out A to Z. Too often we look within when scripture calls us to look out into God’s world to the needs of God’s children. Your epiphany is there, it’s here, and all around in a world that is unaware of the reality of God’s love made clear in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord.

I honestly do not believe we are expected to “discover” our call – but to believe what we have received and to pass it on to all. This morning, I simply want to encourage you to see the text and hear the call - the corporate call that trumps the individual call by defining the essence of our mission. Whether we minister, profess, administer, or simply study morning, noon, and night our call is clear: the call to proclaim Christ in our living and speaking, our working and boasting. For Jesus is God’s once and for all epiphany – his teachings our burning bush, Golgotha our Mt. Sinai, and Christ crucified, a definitive revelation of the Almighty and the precedent for your mission and mine.

This is your call brothers and sisters... consider it well. The rest... the details... are and will likely remain wrapped up in darkness and faith; they are God’s problem (Hallelujah), and for us... well, the details are straw and hay - the needle is Jesus Christ.