

“Called Out”

Deuteronomy 7:6-11 • Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • August 20, 2017

You could say that today is an important day in the life of our church. Following worship we'll have a brief congregational meeting to elect our officers, just as we do every year. In many ways it may seem to be fairly routine. We regularly elect people to represent us on the city council or state legislature or congress. In fact, most organizations elect officers regularly so we don't think about it much. But this is an opportunity for us to pause and reflect on why we do it. In a sense, this is one of the things that sets us apart as Presbyterians. In fact, electing elders, or presbyters, is where we get the name Presbyterian.

One of the key ways this is different is that we are not electing people to represent our interests. We are actually confirming what the nominating committee has discerned – that God has called these people into leadership. Servant leadership. So instead of finding people who will represent *us*, we are electing people who will represent Christ and seek his will for our church.

One of the things we need to remember is that we are not electing members to a board of directors whose job is to make business decisions about running the church organization. Now frequently the Session is called to make those kinds of decisions but it's not their primary job.

The primary role of the elders as a team is to make sure that the mission of the church is carried out. I don't mean they decide on a mission and plan how to do it. I mean they have the task of discerning how God is calling us to participate in His mission. I can't think of anything more exciting than joining God on the greatest adventure of all time.

That's why over the past few weeks we've been talking about what the Bible tells us about being the church. We looked at several of the “one another” commands in the New Testament. These are basically God's instructions on how to relate to each other, and

they all center on loving one another. But the Bible tells us that there's more to being the church than our relationships with each other. Those are important, but there's more to it than that. Remember, the church is God's idea and He has a plan for us.

When we look at how the church is described in the Bible there are some wonderful images. The church is described as the bride of Christ. Paul tells the Corinthians that husbands and wives are to love each other so much that they sacrifice completely for the other. Then he says that this is the relationship of Jesus and the church. The church is also described as the body with Jesus as the head. We also get the picture in the New Testament of the church as an embassy for the Kingdom of God. Paul says that we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal for reconciliation through us.

Hopefully you remember a few weeks ago we said that the mission of the church is to make disciples of Jesus who make disciples of Jesus. That's why God created the church. Not just our church but every church. Today and next week we want to look at how the church is uniquely gifted to make disciples and we can summarize it with three words. These are three verbs. They're action words. The church is to be active. We are to *gather, grow, and go*. We're going to look at the first two today – gathering and growing.

The thing that makes the church different from any other organization in the world is that the church is made up of people called by God. In our reading from Ephesians 4, Paul says, “I...urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the *calling* to which you have been called.” He's saying, God has chosen you and set you apart so live like it. Wow. Deuteronomy 7 gives us a beautiful description of God choosing and setting apart his people: “For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured

possession...because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers.”

One of the great temptations we face as Christians is to think that the only thing that matters is a personal relationship with Jesus. That IS important. But it's not the only thing. God calls us as his *people*. The Christian faith is a team sport. The word most often translated as “church” in the New Testament is the Greek word *ekklesia*, which literally translates as “called out,” but by the time the New Testament was written it meant “an assembly or gathering.” In the Greek version of the Old Testament it's the word used to translate *synagogue*. The word church, then, means the gathering together of Christ-followers.

One of the main reasons we gather is to worship, just as we're doing today. Romans 12:1 says, “I appeal to you therefore, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” Your primary mission in life is to worship and glorify God. Every though, every action, every decision in your life should bring glory to Jesus Christ. That's what it means to present your self as a living sacrifice. It means putting God's purpose for your life ahead of your own personal desires. How are you doing with that?

When we gather to worship we are sacrificing out time and resources and even our personal desires. But we all have room to improve. One of the best ways for us to get better having worshiping lives during the week is to gather with other believers to worship together. The truth is that we need each other. We need to hold each other accountable and encourage each other if we get out of the habit of worshiping. As Paul makes clear here in Ephesians, a big part of gathering is unity, “eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call.”

But simply gathering, even gathering to worship, doesn't fulfill God's plan for the church. We can't just show up and sit, soak,

and sour. If that's all we do we aren't carrying out God's mission, which is to seek and to save the lost, making disciples of Jesus. So the second thing God instructs us to do is to *grow*. Together, as the church, we are responsible for each other's spiritual growth.

Beginning in Ephesians 4:11, Paul writes that God sends leaders “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.” This is one of the key verses about being the church. The job of the church leaders is primarily to equip the saints for the work of ministry. Who are the saints? You are. The Bible says that saints are the living, breathing followers of Jesus. And the work of church leaders such as the elders is help *you* carry out the mission of the church. “We are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

So how do we put this into practice? What can you do to apply this passage to your life? First, “walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” If each of us did that just a little better over the next few weeks it would have a positive impact on the people in your life. We've seen recently the anger and hatred that people are expressing toward each other, sometimes violently. As followers of Jesus we have a higher calling and that means we engage people with humility and gentleness and patience, which is sorely lacking in our society today. We have the opportunity every day to demonstrate the way of Jesus through our actions. By the way, that includes the things you post on social media. Before posting or responding to someone else's post, ask yourself, is this humble, gentle, and bearing with one another in love? If not, don't post it.

Second, since being the church requires each part working properly, spend some time this week thinking about where God might be calling you to help build up the body. How might you help make disciples of Jesus among the people you interact with regularly?

Finally, what keeps you from being more effective in making disciples? This is where we need your feedback. The elders have the job of equipping the saints for ministry. Let them know what kind of equipping you need.

We have been called. Called to gather together, called to grow, called to build one another up, called to live in a way that is different from the way of the world. We are called to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ. And we are called to help others do the same thing.

Amen.