

# SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

## “Called By God”

### Galatians 1:11-24

How many of you have a telephone? As silly as it may sound, if that same question were asked one hundred years ago, my guess is that very few hands would have been raised.

I'm constantly amazed at the number of phones in our society today. It seems like everybody has at least one and in most cases two or more. Many of us not only have a home phone, we also have a work phone and a cell phone. It's not unusual for a family of four to have ten or twelve phones.

But what is unusual and, in a sense, somewhat disappointing is that for all the phones, most of the calls we get really aren't all that important. Oh, sure, some of them are but, let's face it, most of them aren't. Take away the wrong numbers, the calls from someone wanting your opinion, the political ads, the others from people who just want to shoot the breeze and how many important calls do you really get?

More than that, how many life-changing calls do you get? I mean calls that literally change your life? Perhaps the last life-changing call I got was seven years ago when this congregation issued me a formal call to serve as a pastor here at First Good and I got a phone call telling me that. Pastor Brandt is considering such a call even as we speak.

In today's second lesson, St. Paul reminds us of a life-changing call that he got a few years earlier. Of course, it wasn't a telephone call, after all, they didn't have telephones then, It was better – it was a divine call – a call from God himself.

You may remember that he was on his way to Damascus when he got that call. He was going to Damascus to arrest Christians and to bring them back for trial in Jerusalem. You see, Paul was a man on a mission, a mission he thought was from God but wasn't. It was a mission all right but it was a mission borne out of extreme zeal for the traditions of the fathers, as he said, a mission to get rid of this Christianity in general by getting rid of these Christians in particular. You see, he thought this was all a big threat to his religion and the religion of the fathers. And so he zealously sought out Christians, first in Jerusalem including Christians like Stephen. In fact, it seems that Paul was in charge of his stoning. And having sought to rid Jerusalem of these Christians he zealously expanded the net northward to find more and to bring them back to what he perceived to be justice. And so he made his way toward Damascus.

But God had other plans. For it was on that road to Damascus that God “called” Paul. He called him through a vision in which Jesus, the very Son of God, spoke to Paul directly. And that “call” changed Paul forever. It changed his whole life. It changed him from one who stood before God zealous for the traditions of the fathers but dead in unfaith into one who was made alive in Christ and now zealous to proclaim this Christ to the ends of the earth no matter what. It changed him from the inside out. You see, “calls” from God do that to a person.

But more than that, it changed his purpose for living. No longer would he persecute the Church but now he would promote it through his life and ministry – especially to the Gentiles. He would spend the rest of his life fulfilling that purpose until he finally gave his life for the Gospel in Rome. You see, “calls” from God do that to a person.

As I thought about Paul, I realized once again that what was true for him some two thousand years ago is also true for us today. We too have been called by God – not on the road to Damascus but in the water and the word of Holy Baptism. It probably didn’t seem as dramatic as God’s call to Paul but it was just as real and just as important. In baptism God made us His own through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit. And He changed us from the inside out. He changed us whether we knew it or understood it or not. He changed us from sinners into saints for the sake of His Son and our Savior Jesus Christ and He made us members of His Church.

But just as importantly He changed our purpose for living. Called by God in our baptism, we now have a new reason for being. Unlike the world around us, filled with those who live only for themselves, we now live for God and for others. And we, like Paul, are given a new mission. That new mission is best summarized in what is called the “Great Commission” of our Lord – the mission first committed to Christ’s disciples before his ascension – the mission that has come down from one generation to the next until it has now come to us – the mission that says we too are called to go and make disciples for Christ, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things he commanded.

Today is a good day to remember that what God did for Paul he has done for you and me as well and that the mission He gave to him has been given to us too. We too have been called by God so that we might be His instruments in our day and age by which others may hear that same call come to them. In a way, we are God’s telephones today – telephones by which he still seeks to reach out and touch people especially those who still don’t know or don’t believe in Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. Our lives may be different but our ministry is the same no matter what our vocation may be.

As Paul was faithful to his calling, so God stands ready again today to empower us to be faithful to ours as well. God is speaking to us in Word and Sacrament again today in order to strengthen us in faith and life and to empower us to continue to carry out the mission He has entrusted to us in our world today.

May God help us all to that end this coming week and forever for Jesus’ sake. And to God be the glory forever and ever. Amen.