

St. John's Lutheran Church  
August 17, 2008

"Listen, God Is Calling!"  
Matthew 15:10-28

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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

We have sung the hymn many times. Its title is, "Listen, God Is Calling!" It is Hymn No. 513 in our hymnals. You might want to turn to it right now as we meditate this morning on its theme. It is not one of the classic Lutheran hymns. Rather, it came to the Lutheran Church in this country in the mid-1990's from its roots in Tanzania, Africa. But we have sung it enough over the last decade that perhaps the words are familiar to you.

"Listen, listen, God is calling, through the word inviting, offering forgiveness, comfort, and joy." The hymn is very expressive of that reality that is so much on the surface in Tanzania – the expectation that God is present and active in human lives. And that one of the ways that Godly activity is known is as God, in many ways, continues to call us into relationship with him.

"Listen, God is calling." It is a theme that is going to be accented in a number of ways as we move from summer into fall at St. John's Church. "Listen, God is calling." It is the theme of an outreach brochure that is going to reach thousands of homes in the greater Lakeville area in a few weeks, offering the ministry of St. John's Church to our greater community this fall. "Listen, God is calling." It is the theme of the September edition of St. John's Journal which you should be receiving in the mail in about a week or so. "Listen, God is calling." It is the theme of St. John's Sunday morning Adult Education for September which I will be leading. I look forward to adults of the congregation joining me in the sanctuary at 9:40 Sunday mornings in September to listen to God calling through the Bible.

"Listen, God is calling." It is the theme for our worship this morning as well as we begin even this morning to anticipate the fall. It is the refrain of the Tanzanian hymn that celebrates the call of God that draws us into relationship with God. "Listen, God is calling, through the Word inviting, offering forgiveness, comfort, and joy." We celebrate our relationship with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

But in the verses that follow the refrain there is a secondary theme to the hymn that emerges that is equally important as the primary theme. And that secondary theme is that when God calls, he calls us not only for our own sakes. Rather, when God calls, God calls us into relationship with him also for the sake of others. Verse 1: "Jesus gave his mandate: share the good news that he came to save us and set us free." And again, verse 2: "Let none be forgotten throughout the world. In the triune name of God go and baptize."

It is the theme of the Christian who believes for the sake of others. It is the theme of the Church that exists for the sake of those who are not yet in the church. It is the theme of God calling us to reach out to others in our lives.

It is also the theme of our Gospel reading for this morning. The theme is sounded most strongly in the second half of the reading in Jesus' encounter with the Canaanite woman. It is one of the events in Jesus' life when he begins to realize the full scope of his ministry on earth. Jesus begins to realize that he has come to the earth not only for the sake of the people of Israel, his own people, but ultimately for the sake of all in the whole world who would come to believe in him.

Again, what happens in the reading is that Jesus has left the country. He has left Palestine and taken his disciples to the region of Tyre and Sidon which were cities outside of the land of Israel to the north on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. And a resident of the area, a woman, comes calling for Jesus to have mercy upon her and upon her daughter who is tormented by a demon.

The Scripture says she was a Canaanite. Now, the Canaanite people were the traditional enemies of the people of Israel as it was they with whom the Israelites had to struggle when the Israelites returned to Canaan after their sojourn of slavery in Egypt. And in true Israelite tradition, Jesus ignores the Canaanite woman and her pleas. The disciples find that her begging for Jesus' mercy is so annoying that they urge Jesus to send her away. And Jesus' response is that he doesn't even want to offer her that much attention, saying, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

But the woman is persistent. And in the give and take that follows between Jesus and the woman, Jesus becomes amazed at her faith. And he ultimately responds by reaching out beyond the boundaries of the people of Israel to heal the daughter of the Canaanite woman. And Jesus begins to expand his ministry to include all those who would believe in him, no matter what their nationality or culture. Jesus begins to

understand all that was included in God's call to him. Perhaps it was uncomfortable for Jesus at first, being a traditional Jew, but he began to understand that God's call to him was not just for the sake of the Jews, but for the sake of all people who would believe in him.

Dear friends in Christ, "Listen, God is calling." As God called his Son Jesus to reach out beyond the people of God, so God calls you and me to reach out beyond the people of God. To be the means whereby God might continue to call others into relationship with him, in order that they, too, might know forgiveness, comfort, and joy. Amen.