

St. John's Lutheran Church
September 28, 2008

"Faith Active in Love"
Matthew 21:23-32

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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.

It is official now! Last Monday evening St. John's Council adopted as the program theme for the entire congregation for the 2008-2009 program year the theme, "Listen, God is Calling!" The theme is rooted in the Tanzanian hymn by the same name and, of course, in Holy Scripture as well. "Listen, God is Calling!" The hymn will be St. John's Hymn of the Month for October, beginning next Sunday, October 5. The entire congregation is invited to offer all of its program this program year with this banner theme in mind, "Listen, God is Calling!" even as we listen for God's call in our daily lives!

Our worship this morning is an opportunity for each of us individually and also for us as a congregation to hear God's call anew. God's call comes to us in at least two dimensions. On the one hand God calls us into relationship with him. Secondly, God calls us to work in his vineyard.

First and foremost, seventh graders, who are wrapping up this morning your first month of taking worship notes, God is calling us deeply into relationship with him. "Listen, God is Calling us deeply into relationship with him. At the 10:45 service this morning, Chase Michael will be baptized. And in the water and the word of holy baptism, God will be calling Chase Michael into relationship with him. God will be adopting Chase Michael as his very own son, and connecting Chase Michael to the death and resurrection of Jesus whereby Chase Michael will be saved.

You and I, dear friend in Christ, have experienced the very same miracle in our lives. For you and I have experienced our own baptisms. And the very same miracle transpired in our baptisms as will transpire this morning in the baptism of Chase Michael. We, too, have been adopted by God as his sons and daughters. We, too, have been connected to the death and resurrection of Jesus as the power whereby we, too are being saved.

It is also true that each and every day of his life, Chase Michael will continue to be called by God into that relationship which is his by Holy Baptism. Through the nurturing work of his parents and baptismal sponsors, extended family, congregation, and by other experiences of his life, Chase Michael will continue to be called by God into relationship with God.

In the same way, even this very day, you and I continue to be called into relationship with God as well. Jesus said, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest." It is not unusual in this life that we would find ourselves weary. And it is not unusual in this life that we would find ourselves with a sense that our burdens are heavy. If it is true that there is a heaviness to our lives it is also not unusual that we have a thought that we are alone in the experience of such burden. But the fact is that we are not alone. It is a very common experience of the human condition – that our earthly lives are not all we wish that they would be. And we long to be relieved of our burdens.

It is for this purpose, among many purposes, that God is calling us even this day into deeper relationship with him. It is God's desire that we would be people of faith. It is God's desire that we would live each day with awareness that there is for us a power that is greater than our own. And that each and every day we are called to draw upon that power in order that the burden of the day might be lessened for us and we might find ourselves with a lightened footstep along life's way. Listen, God is Calling us deeper into relationship with him.

Seventh graders, there is a second main point to the Word of the Lord for us this morning as well. And that second main point is this: Listen, God is Calling us to go to work in his vineyard. Listen, God is Calling us to go to work in his vineyard.

God's call to us to be in relationship with him is much like the relationship of a person in the family. On the one hand, it is a good thing to be a member of a family for the person who is the member of a family. God has established the human family as a strong context in which people might live and grow and experience this earthly life. Living in the family is a good thing for each individual family member.

But it is also true that the person who lives in a family lives in a family for the good of the entire family. Each family member contributes to the good of the entire family. And the family is a means whereby each family member is also able to contribute, through the family, to the good of the world beyond the family as well.

It is the same for God's call to us to live in relationship with him. Such relationship is surely good for us

alone. It is good for us in terms of our eternal salvation in Christ and it is good for us in terms of strength for our daily walk in this world. But God's call to us is more than this. God's call to us includes a call for each of us to be an instrument whereby God might accomplish his work in the world as well.

In our Gospel reading for today, from the Gospel of Matthew the 21st chapter, the image that Jesus uses for God's work in the world is the vineyard. And in this Gospel reading Jesus speaks of a father who calls his sons into work in the vineyard. And although Jesus has an interesting contrast between one son who says he will go to work in the vineyard but then does not go and the other son who says he will not go but ultimately does go to work in the vineyard, yet Jesus' main point is the importance of the work in the vineyard. And each of the sons opportunity and responsibility to work in that vineyard.

Dear friends in Christ, you and I are the sons and daughters of God who are called to work in his vineyard. The means whereby God desires to accomplish his will in the world is through you and through me. Where, then is this vineyard into which God is calling us to work? There are at least two locations for the vineyard for you and for me.

For participants in St. John's Church, one location of God's vineyard is right here – St. John's Church. One of the ways that God desires to work in the world in our place in the world is through St. John's Church. So it is that as you and I work within the program and ministry of this congregation, God is able to work through us to accomplish that which he desires through this congregation. Even such a simple thing as your participation in our worship this morning allows God the means whereby through word and holy sacrament he might work his saving work among us, calling all who so participate in worship into relationship with him.

At the same time, wherever it is that you spend most of your time throughout the week is also God's vineyard for you. That means that God desires to be active through you to accomplish his work in the lives of others in your home, in your school, in your neighborhood, in your job – wherever it is that you find yourself day in and day out throughout your week. Listen, God is calling you there in order that through you he might accomplish that which he desires to accomplish in your corner of his vineyard.

Listen, in your life today: For surely God is surely calling. Amen.