

The Approval of God

Proper4/2afterPent

Pastor Josh Frazee

Gal. 1:1-12

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Something I try not to do in sermons is talk about myself. This week, though, it fits our text, so I'm going to share an account of something that happened to me just this Thursday. As I tell you about this account, though, consider Paul's first words to the brothers and sisters in Galatia: "Paul, an apostle—not from man nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead."

With those words in mind, here's the account of my being called "old school." Thursday morning I went down to St. Louis to see a member who was in the hospital there. On my return trip, I stopped at Collinsville to use the restroom. Going to the men's room, I found it locked with someone inside, so I began to wait.

While I stood there waiting, a voice said to me, "You must be old school." I turned to see a police officer. I asked him, "What do you mean?" It hit me as he soon as he began to answer because there had been a number of women in and out of the adjacent restroom while I'd been waiting. At the same time as I realized this, the police officer said, "Because you waited in line, instead of calling yourself transgender, and just using the women's room."

That's the end of the account—so far; and now we can apply it to our Epistle text from Galatians. Like with any of you, who I am makes very little difference compared to *Whose* I am, but considering I was wearing my clerical collar, this account might also make us reconsider the calling of the ministry. This is precisely what Paul covers in the text from his letter not only this week, but also next, so we'll take a couple weeks to consider the ministry as a calling, as revealed to us by Paul concerning his own, as well as the need to keep our unity in the faith.

Verse 1

Hear again Paul's first words: "Paul, an apostle."

Stop and think about those words. Why would Paul have begun in this way? He began this way because there were apparently some who did not consider his words to be those of God. It goes a step further than that, as well. While any good disciple of Christ, including us, can and should use the Word of God in speaking to others, Paul had had a unique calling. Yes, he was called to give sermons just as any other man who is properly called may preach, yet it goes even further than that. Paul had been called directly by Jesus Christ Himself. Directly called, that is, he heard Jesus' own voice, while all other pastors to follow would be called indirectly by God through the work of the church, like the pastor before you.

Paul reminds the brothers and sisters in Galatia of his calling so that they will listen closely to his words, because they are not his words, but God's Word for them. Yes, even before the Reformation, there were temptations to fall away from God's Word, and unfortunately some were. Paul writes to them: "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel" but then he clarifies, "not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ." Paul writes this way so that there would not be division in the church.

Have any of your thoughts returned to that police officer commenting on a pastor being "old school"? Why would he make such a comment—unless it is because there is more than one kind of pastor out there? The

sad fact is that despite Paul's warnings from this and other texts, we have fallen into divisions. Again, not that there is more than one gospel; there is only one. Yet so many claim to be Christian denominations when they forget to even mention Jesus' death and resurrection. Look to the back of your bulletins. See where Paul immediately speaks of Jesus' death and resurrection in his opening? He does it twice!

What is even sadder is what else happened this week. There was an article in the St. Louis Post Dispatch concerning the Licensed Lay Deacon ministry. If you read that article, you learned how brothers and sisters in Christ are willing to split even again if they don't get their way regarding these programs. To be clear, the decision hasn't even been made yet. There will be a convention in July to determine what God's Word says about these programs, and yet already some are saying that they will split from the other side if things don't go their way. Are they "so quickly deserting him who called (them) in the grace of Christ?" The body of Christ is to be united, not divided.

Verse 2

Obviously there is a difference between the two things we just discussed. One is a police officer commenting on how a pastor did not go along with societal standards, and the other is on a decision regarding how to best proceed with advancing the Gospel. The problem with both of these is that they have the potential to drive us apart. So what is the solution? Keeping in God's Word.

Satan can and does use whatever he can to try to stop the spread of the Gospel. He will use those who claim to be Christian pastors who speak about loving Christ, but then go against God's Word because of societal standards. He will even use disagreement regarding a program meant to *help distribute* the Gospel. Satan loves division. He loves strife. He loves anything that takes our focus off of Jesus Christ crucified and risen for you and me.

That is why God created the ministry. Jesus called the first apostles, and even Paul, and then Jesus and the apostles began calling other disciples. That tradition has carried down even to today. But again, beware of false teachers. Only one church has the doctrine right, and many of you and I have confessed and confirmed that we believe that the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod is that church. It would be better to say the Christian church, since as Paul wrote, Luther didn't die for our sins. The problem is that while other denominations don't have all the doctrines right, they do from time to time preach Christ crucified and risen, and the Spirit can work through that, despite all their heretical teachings. You've heard me say it before and I'll say it again, I don't believe only LCMS Christians will be in heaven; however, I do believe, and you have confessed and confirmed, that the LCMS has the proper doctrine of God's Word. So don't desert it.

"But," as Paul continues, "even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed." How can I quote Paul's having written this? How could he have written it? Because of our calling. We, like you, have confessed the truth of God's Word, but more than that, Paul's calling and my own require that we stick to it or die for the sake of it, rather than follow Satan or society and mislead those to whom we deliver God's Word.

Verse 3

"(A)m I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ."

Going back to the account from earlier, judge for yourselves: was I seeking the approval of man by not going into the women's room, or of God's? Would I have been trying to please man by calling myself transgender and using it, or by preaching that such things are according to God's Word? I do not seek man's approval, just as Paul did not. That is the character of our calling as pastors, the calling we have from God to preach the Word in its full truth and purity and to administer the Sacraments. We preach and teach so that you may be kept in the one true faith in your Savior Jesus Christ, crucified and risen for you.

To finish the account, I found out that that police officer was a fellow Christian. True, he was not an LCMS Lutheran, he was Catholic. But at the same time, he and I spoke and he was in unity with us against this bathroom situation, as are many other police and sheriffs throughout the country. While I did tell him that I was an LCMS pastor, I did not try to convert him to Lutheranism outright. I was happy to have a brother who knew God's Word was against such a thing. After all, even Jesus did not permit the apostles from silencing those others teaching in His Name, and I won't either. Though at the same time, I hope that that police officer may consider becoming LCMS Lutheran from our brief conversation.

By the nature of my calling, I desire that all come to the truth of God's Word in its fullness and purity, whether that be in line with the police and society or not. In the case of my account, it was right in the middle, some of the police are backing God's Word on the topic, but society is not. Again, it is not for my sake that I told you this account, but for the sake of the calling that I have been given in Christ Jesus, crucified for your sins and my sins, and risen that you and I may have life in His Name. As we continue to hear this truth, it can and will continue to keep us in unity with one another through God's Holy Spirit and for the sake of Jesus Christ. In Jesus' Name. Amen.