

When Jesus calls, things change. Take those men on the shores of the Sea of Galilee in the gospel today. Fishing was their occupation. Boats and nets were their livelihood. But then came Jesus' call, "follow me," and everything changed. Boats and nets get left on the beach. Ordinary fishermen become something extraordinary – eyewitnesses of Christ's work, fishers of men – all because of Jesus' call.

The same could be said of Elisha in the first lesson. His oxen went from field equipment to a thank offering...his livelihood from sowing seed to sowing God's saving Word...all because of Jesus' call through Elijah.

It's true – you haven't been called to full-time ministry as prophets or apostles in the same sense these men were. But you have been called to faith, to following. And when Jesus did that for you, things changed for you, too. The example of the church in Antioch reminds us of that this morning. This is one of the very first big Christian congregations in the early church. In fact, it was the place where believers in Jesus first started calling each other "Christians." But in so many ways, it's no different than *this* group of Christians. We'll see how for them, and for us, Christ's call changed it all...by (1) uniting us in him, and (2) setting us apart for his service.

In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul.
² **While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."** ³ **So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.**

⁴ **The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus.** ⁵ **When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper.**

Luke's description of this church in Antioch starts with the leaders. And talk about a diverse bunch. Let's start with **Saul** (Paul). Remember his back-story? He was the former Pharisee who had been hunting down Christians like animals. Strangely enough, this congregation was founded by some believers on the run from Saul who fled to Antioch and shared the gospel there. Now, Jesus has brought Saul to faith...and he's their pastor!

Barnabas was from the island of Cyprus in the Mediterranean. He was the first pastor in Antioch. The apostles had sent him up to encourage them as they grew in faith and numbers.

The rest of these men we don't know much about. Seems like **Simeon** was from Africa; his nickname is a Latin word that probably refers to his darker skin. **Lucius** was from **Cyrene**, modern day Libya. **Manaen** had grown up royalty in the palace alongside Herod – the same Herod who mocked Jesus before his crucifixion.

So can you picture the scene you've got in Antioch? You've got Jews and Greeks...a former persecutor and his former persecutees...leaders from different countries, with different skin colors, upbringings, social standings...and what does Luke tell us they're doing? They're all on their knees...shoulder to shoulder...**worshipping the Lord** together. What could possibly be powerful enough to bring together and keep together a group so different?

Christ the Lord Lutheran
Epiphany 2
January 21, 2018

Pastor Abram Degner
Acts 13:1-5
"Christ's Call Changed it All"

Only the one they were worshipping: Jesus. Christ's call changed it all. By one gospel, he had called them to one faith, in him as their one Savior. When he did, he took people so different and *made them one.*

Did you ever look at the people who sit shoulder to shoulder with you every Sunday and just marvel at it? (CTL gives Antioch a run for its money in the diversity department.) I counted members from 13 different countries, at least as many states, three different languages. I'm not sure if we have any royalty here, but there are different upbringings, pasts, economic levels, political leanings, preferences in worship, ideas for ministry.

How did a group like this come together? How does it *stay* together? Only Jesus. His call changed it all. By calling us to one faith in him as our one Savior, *he made us one.* The same in the only way that really counts: He made us his own. Forgiven children of God, redeemed from sin, death, and hell by his sacrifice on the cross.

But we struggle to live this unity. Because it's easy to let the differences loom larger in our minds than the One who unites us. And so different language or immigration status leads us to be not as warm and welcoming...to act as if this church isn't quite as much theirs as ours...their needs, not as important as ours. Different ideas about ministry lead to hard feelings, division...two locations breed an "us" vs. "them" mentality.

We don't know why they first started calling each other "Christians" in Antioch...but could it be that they struggled to live as one, too, and they wanted the reminder? Jew, Greek, slave, free...they all belonged to *one* Savior, Christ.

Friends, you have reminders of the same. Every Sunday, gathered shoulder to shoulder with Christians here and all over the world, so different from you in so many ways, all bending the knee before the cross, seeing the same Jesus dying for your sins and theirs. At the altar, hearing "given and shed for you" – and then hearing those same words spoken to the different people next to you. For them, too. You pray, "Our Father" – not just mine, "ours" – and you're reminded that, for all of our differences, Jesus made us the same in the only way that counts: Forgiven children of God, redeemed from sin, death, and hell by his blood...a people belonging to him.

It's not common upbringing or preferences that make us one... it's not one language or location that unites us... it's Jesus. The more we bend the knee together before his cross, the more our differences will seem trivial in comparison to the One who made us one. The more we'll see we're not just one in faith – we're one in mission, too. Jesus call has set us all apart – dedicated us all to his service.

You see that in this church in Antioch. ² **While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."** ³ **So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.** It's true; Jesus calls two of these Christians – Saul and Barnabas – and sets them apart for a special ministry. They'd be full-time missionaries – the rest of Acts follows Paul as he shares the gospel with thousands of souls on this journey and two others.

But do you see the whole congregation dedicated to Christ's service here? All the believers willingly give these two pastors so Jesus' can use them to share the gospel with others. They support them with their prayers. Send them off with encouragement and supplies. One of them, John Mark, even chooses to go with them to be their full-time helper.

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They got it, didn’t they? Jesus didn’t just set Barnabas and Saul apart for a special task. When he called them all to faith, he set them all apart for a special task. For a life no longer lived for themselves, but for him who died for them and was raised again. A life with the sole purpose of bringing Jesus glory and bringing his gospel to others. Christ’s call changed it all.

That’s something that can be easy to forget in our daily lives: That Jesus has set us apart for this special and wonderful and eternally important task: Bringing him glory and bringing his gospel to others. And when we forget it, then whatever job Jesus has placed you in becomes just a job – a means to a paycheck, a way to survive. Then the duties that he’s called us to do in whatever station he’s placed us in in life – whether parent, child, student – those duties become just something that has to be done. We can start to see the gifts of money, time, abilities we have as ours to do with as we see fit. We can quickly start to live lives that are dedicated to ourselves, not Jesus.

But it’s that empty and self-centered way of life that Jesus has rescued us from! Luther reminds you of that in his explanation to the second article of the creed. First, he tells you what Christ did for you: “He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased” And then he reminds you of the glorious task that Jesus has set you apart for: “All this he did...”

See what a difference that makes for your everyday life? Christ’s call changed it all. Whatever job you have is no longer just a job, a way to earn a paycheck; it’s a God-given way to bring Jesus glory as you do it faithfully. Those duties Jesus calls you to in whatever station of life you’re in, no matter how mundane they are – from washing dishes to doing your math homework – Jesus says you’re doing those things for him. The time, money, abilities you have – those temporary gifts you can’t take beyond the grave – those temporary gifts, by calling you to faith and setting you apart for this special purpose, Jesus has given those temporary gifts an eternal and lasting value as you use them to support gospel ministry. Christ’s call changed it all, because it has set us apart for this glorious purpose Jesus had prepared for us before time began.

Christ’s call changed it all. May the gospel that called us to faith and made us one in Him keep us as one in him, and may it give us hearts that are ever more dedicated to his service. Amen.