

It's for You

How many times after the telephone rang have you heard the words, "it's for you"? Lots of times, I'm sure.

Whether you just heard a classic bell sound, a buzz on the intercom, Fur Elise by Beethoven, or a techno-jazz riff on your brand new iPhone, it's a signal -- someone is waiting on the line and wants YOUR attention—they're calling YOU for a purpose!

I know when our home phone rang when I was a teenager (and we had only one phone in those days, remember??), my inner child experienced that anticipatory excitement that comes, just for a split second or two, by the wonder of "who's calling me? -- I really hope it's something good!" What could it be?

Receiving a call can be, or mean many things, of course, and we get so many types of "calls" -- inbound messages with different purposes -- with various objectives -- family calls, sales calls, personal calls, business calls, --- and on and on --- The main thing most of these types of calls have is they are received aurally, by ear.

But there are other ways that calls can be made.....

Now, back in the spring of '57, 57 AD, that is, the apostle Paul made an important "call" to the church in Rome; he had a number of things on his mind, and he wanted the Romans to have some time to think about them before he arrived there. Unlike many of us today, he didn't have 4G cellular service, so he put the subjects of his call in a letter, -- in black & white, or more likely black & light brown parchment.

Paul, in his New Testament letter, was expressing hope for several things: 1) that the church in Rome would welcome him and support his proposed trip to Spain to spread the gospel of Christ, 2) secondly, he shared with them his

views on the gospel of salvation, in the strong hope that he and the Romans were on the same page; and 3) he wanted to affirm that Rome's church would accept Jewish converts to Christianity, despite the local Gentiles' concerns about Jewish adherence to traditional dietary laws, etc. These issues and others comprised a significant and critically important agenda for the emerging Christian church, way back in '57!

In my last sermon here, I talked about how, according to Paul in Romans chapter 3, through faith, we are "justified" by God -- that is, he forgives our sins and sees us as righteous in his eyes.

In chapter 8, which was our Epistle reading today, Paul is saying to the Believers in Rome, that they should, indeed, obey their own laws, which they have followed for generations, but that obedience alone does not earn the justifying grace of God and his sanctifying salvation. He speaks about this here because many early followers of Christ and potential converts are wrestling with the notion, that despite their obedience to their laws, they are still sinners, and that's not good! They are anguished because for generations they were taught -- "follow these laws and you'll be fine! You'll be a good person."

So in Romans 8, Paul gives encouragement to those waiting for God's kingdom. Help is at hand! He is talking about the help of "the Spirit". Verses 1-2: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus, the law of the Spirit of life has set me free from the law of sin and death." The power of the Holy Spirit is here now! And IT'S FOR YOU says Paul.

The Holy Spirit is by our side to help us! This, to me is both comforting and exhilarating -- a significant manifestation of God's love! We have the assistance of the Spirit in our faith journeys and in our supplications! Pretty good stuff, and Paul goes on to make it even clearer:

Verses 26-28: "...the moment we get tired of waiting (for the kingdom, the good time coming), God's Spirit is right alongside us, helping us along. If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. The Spirit does our praying for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans, keeping us present before God. That's why we can be sure that every detail in our LIVES OF LOVE FOR GOD, works into something good. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, those who have been CALLED to his purpose." In our LIVES OF LOVE FOR GOD, the power of the Spirit is here, and IT'S FOR YOU. (pause)

In the spring of '67, (1967 that is) the power of the Spirit came to me; I knew that after that Good Friday service had ended, I was being asked to stay and listen to the Lord. I did. The Lord said, "there is a path of service available to you in Christ's church; IT'S THERE FOR YOU – and now is a good time for you, Parker, to decide whether or not you will follow such a path". I was a college junior, facing military conscription in a year's time, I knew the Spirit was right -- it was an ideal time to ponder such a decision. I did, and ended up not choosing to follow a path of Christian service in 1967.

One year ago, the Spirit was even more assertive than usual with me one Sunday morning in this place; an open space appeared before me in my mind's eye and it was clear that I could move into that space; why was this vision spot on for me then?? I had been searching for something since I had retired from a career as a Human Resources Director several years ago; searching for a meaningful way to become more engaged in productive pursuits. When I saw the "open space" in front of me, I knew it was that productive opportunity before me – church ministry! And The Lord said, "you can do this!" as I saw the altar and the Cross of Jesus before me. IT'S FOR YOU.

I began then and there to feel in my heart that it was for me! The call of the Spirit was clear and the "rightness " of it continues to this day to be very empowering indeed!

I imagine that a similar feeling of empowerment was in Paul's heart as he concluded that portion of his Epistle to the Romans in chapter 8 where he says.: "Nothing fazes us because Jesus loves us. I'm absolutely convinced that nothing -- nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable -- absolutely nothing can get between us and God's love because of the way Jesus our master has embraced us."

Brothers and sisters, I would tell you today, that that embrace, the love of God in Christ, the helping power of the Spirit is here now! IT'S FOR YOU whenever you open your heart in truth and humility to the Lord. IT'S FOR YOU to show you a way to serve.

IT'S FOR YOU when you pray for aid, for healing or to pray for others. IT TRULY IS FOR YOU --- Be ready to feel its power and heed its call!

Let us pray, remembering these words from a wonderful hymn:

"The Spirit sends us forth to serve; we go in Jesus' name to bring glad tidings to the poor, God's favor to proclaim.

"Then let us go to serve in peace, the gospel to proclaim.

God's Spirit has empowered us; we go in Jesus' name."

Amen

Opening Prayer:

Lord, you are the Word; you are God in three – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. May our words and thoughts this morning help to open our hearts and minds to your

will, your eternal love for us, and to help guide us to perform acts of justice and mercy for those in need. Amen

With young disciples:

Heritage Sunday in the UMC

“Heritage” -- things of value that are inherited or passed along or passed down to children, over time, such as cultural traditions, philosophies, and belongings (like photographs, jewelry, books, etc.)

Traditions are things we do --- actions or activities that are repeated because people believe they are good, and they have valuable meaning for their children, their families and friends.

--Are there valuable things you do that your parents taught you?

--What else have do you think you've gotten from your Mom or Dad or Grandparents?

Closing prayer: Lord we thank you for the good things we are given by you and our parents. Help us to live good lives and have our traditions of goodness be a heritage to our children and family members in the future. Amen.