

“Who Am I?”

The Ordination and Installation Service for 2012 Class of Elders and Deacons

Today we are ordaining and installing our new class of elders and deacons for 2012- Phil Lail, Rosemary Rector, Joe Tomlin, Deena Chambers, David Weatherman, and Dean Bentley. They will be serving on the session and diaconate of our church for the next three years.

They, like Moses, have heard God’s voice call them to lead the people of God in our church.

Unlike Moses, God did not speak to them through a burning bush. God spoke to them in another way, a way that is just as reliable and faithful.

God spoke to them through the Bible, their own inward sense of call, and through the outward call of the church. That is how we Presbyterians believe God speaks to His people today. The call is both inward and outward. It’s not just their call- that is not good enough. God has to call them, they have to sense it, and the people in the congregation have to recognize, hear, and discern that call as well.

God has spoken, and you and they have listened and responded to that call, so today they begin their journey of leadership on the session and diaconate of the church.

Though their encounter with God was much different than Moses’ encounter, I think they would say that they share much in common with Moses in terms of how they have experienced that call.

Standing on Holy Ground (reverence)

Our text tells us that when God spoke to Moses he told him not to come any closer because he was standing on holy ground.

Today is a holy ground moment. It is a special day. God is doing an awesome work in leading these elders to this point and place of leadership.

Today is a day where these six people will want to “take off their shoes,” so to speak, because they too are in the presence of God in a special way.

In Moses’ day it was customary to take off one’s shoes when one entered a holy place. Their sandals would have been dirty and dusty; therefore one would want take off his shoes, so as to not defile the holy place in which one was entering. Shoes, sandals, dirt, and feet are still pretty much viewed in the same kind of way today in the Middle East.

Today we want to acknowledge God’s holiness by showing proper reverence to Him.

The Bible says that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.”

God commands us to revere His holiness, and the same words that were on the lips of the prophet Isaiah, when he was ushered into the holy, earth shaking presence of God, ought to be on our lips also.

Woe to me! I am ruined!
For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips,
and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.

Struck With Fear (scared)

The text also tells us that when Moses encountered God's call in his life Moses was stricken with fear.

Verse 6 says that when God spoke to Moses in the bush that "he hid his face" because he was afraid to look at God.

Just a moment ago I mention Proverbs 1:1 that talks about the "fear of the Lord" being the beginning of knowledge. What that verse means is to have reverence for God. But this word in our text for "afraid," in v.6, is really hitting at the idea that Moses was actually scared when God called him.

I think anybody who is called to serve God in ordained office experiences that kind of fear. I am sure the elders today have all experienced that at some point along the way, if not even right now.

I don't remember much about the first Sunday I stepped into a pulpit, much of it is a blur, but this one thing I do remember- I remember how scared I was on that first Sunday.

It's kind of like that feeling you get on your very first day of school, or your first day on the job. Experiencing God's call to serve His church is scary.

Elders and deacons, if you are experiencing some of that fear it is ok. You're normal. Moses felt it. Solomon felt it. Isaiah felt it. Jeremiah felt it. Jonah felt it. The timid disciples felt it. All the saints have been stricken with fear, when they were called by God.

There is good reason to fear. For it is an awesome task; a task that comes with great responsibility. The book of James tells us that not many of us ought to be teachers because we "will be judged more strictly."

Feelings of Inadequacy (unworthiness)

Closely related to this idea of fear is also a feeling of inadequacy. Moses did not feel up to the task. It's all in this story.

God, you're calling me? You want me to go to the king of Egypt and tell him to let my people go? You've got to be kidding me...

I'm a fugitive, a man on the run. I'm wanted by the Egyptians for killing a man. My own people, the Hebrews, are angry with me for breaking up a fight. I'm a lousy speaker. I stutter. I do not know your name God. I'm lacking in faith. I have no ability. I'm an alien and a lowly shepherd. What do you mean that you are calling me?

That's right Moses. I, Yahweh, the Lord, have called you to this task.

But Lord, I am inadequate, I am ill equipped, and I am scared.

That doesn't matter Moses. I have called you by name. "Moses. Moses."

Again, these feelings of inadequacy are very normal for those who have been called to lead God's people in the church. In fact, if you didn't feel some sense of inadequacy I would question your call.

Solomon and Jeremiah spoke of themselves as being children. Solomon said in his prayer, "I am only but a child and do not know how to carry out my duties." Jeremiah cried out, "I do not know how to speak; I am only a child."

Isaiah and Paul confessed their sinfulness. Isaiah said he was a man of unclean lips. The apostle Paul spoke of himself as being the chief of all sinners, and as one who was untimely born, but he was what he was by the grace of God.

Peter, at first, did not think of himself as being inadequate, but his actions soon proved otherwise. He was an inadequate man.

The fact of the matter is that every human being, in his own strength, is inadequate for the task of leadership in the church. None are worthy. "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."

Elders and deacons, if you feel inadequate it is ok. The truth is, you are inadequate, but God is not.

The All-Sufficient Adequacy of God

In the text the Lord told Moses that He had heard the cries of His people and that He Himself would be the one who would go down to rescue His people.

I have seen the misery of my people in Egypt. **I have heard** them crying out because of their slave drivers, and **I am concerned** about their suffering. So **I have come down to rescue them** from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

We are inadequate. All humans are inadequate, but not God. The Lord is more than sufficient for the task at hand. This we need to remember when we are struck with feelings of inadequacy. God is our source of strength.

The Exhortation to Live the Higher Calling

This, of course, always has to be balanced with the fact that God expects more from those who are called to ordained leadership in the church than He does from those who aren't.

We are called to a higher standard for the sake of the body.

We are asked to affirm and believe more in terms of our faith and Christian doctrine, and we are asked to be more in terms of our moral behavior, and do more in terms of our service in the church- we are servants, slaves, to the body of Christ. Do we do this so that we might set a proper example and give no one in the church an excuse to not strive for the same things in their own Christian lives.

Both the Old and New Testament make this very clear. Moses' father-in-law called to him to get some helpers, some elders to assist him in God's kingdom work and Jethro instructed Moses to choose men "who fear God" and are "trustworthy." (Ex. 18)

Paul in his listing of qualifications stated that elders are to be "above reproach, husbands of but one wife, temperate, self controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, sober, gentle, not lovers money, good managers of their families, and not recent converts." (I Tim. 3:2-4)

To read a list of virtues like this is humbling, but it is the standard, and we are called to live into it, to the very best of our ability, for the glory of God.

The Tools that God Gives to Help Us Faithfully Live out the Call

We can take comfort in knowing that Jesus gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit to empower us to do and become all these things so that we might faithfully lead the people of God.

Jesus also gives to us the body of Christ- fellow believers who will pray for their leaders, lift them up, encourage them, and respect their decisions. For the elders and deacons are called to reflect the will of Christ as they lead the church.

God also gives to us the gift of corporate worship. It is here, in this place, that elders and deacons encounter the Word of God, Jesus Christ, through the preaching of the Word and the partaking of the sacraments.

God also gives to us the Bible, the written Word of God, and when the elder and deacon reads it, studies it, meditates upon it, he or she will find the Word breathing God's life into their life and ministry.

The standard that God calls us to in this life of leadership is not entirely attainable this side of heaven. But we most certainly ought to make it our aim, and we can and most certainly ought to make progress in our striving for it.

I love what the Westminster Confession of Faith says about this life long process of growing in the faith.

This sanctification is throughout, in the whole man; yet imperfect in this life, there abiding still some remnants of corruption in every part; whence ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war, the flesh lusting against the Sprit, and the Spirit against the flesh.

In which war, the remaining corruption, for a time, may much prevail; yet, through continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part doth overcome; and so the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (WCF XIII.2)

That is a wonderful summation of what Jesus Christ does via the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer in his or her Christian life.

Conclusion

“Who am I?”

Elders and deacons, you are a Christian and you have been called by God to lead the people of God; and you are more than qualified because Jesus Christ has died in your place for the forgiveness of your sins and he has been raised from the dead.

God has filled you with the resurrection power of his Holy Spirit in your life and you “can do all things through Christ who gives you strength.” “Therefore shepherd this flock of God that is entrusted under your care, serving as overseers- not because you must, but because you are willing, just as God wants you to be.”

By the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit you can do it. God believes in you, I believe in you, and your church believes in you.

Amen.