

Calling God

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

Luke 4:1-13

Romans 10:8b-13

10:8b "The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim);

10:9 because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

10:10 For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.

10:11 The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame."

10:12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him.

10:13 For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

I almost named this sermon, "Operator, Information, give me Jesus, on the line . . ." because every time I read something somewhere in the bible about "calling the Lord", I imagined this song (makes it hard to focus on the text at times). The image of picking up the phone - and calling Jesus is just so precious (but nowadays we'd have him on speed dial)!

As a child I loved the idea of talking to Jesus, like talking to Grandma. I so wanted to talk to him or see him. I can't tell you the number of times in my childhood that I laid in bed at night praying and wanting so desperately for Jesus to just magically appear in my room. I'd lay there praying, loving Jesus with all my heart, and wanting *so* that he would come visit me in my room . . . I'd shut my eyes real tight . . . then slowly peaking one eye open . . . then, I felt embarrassed, because I was trying to manipulate God, trying to test and see if Jesus was real and if he really loved me.

I guess it was a mini version of what the devil was doing to Jesus in the desert. As I get older I find that I have fewer and fewer moments where I wonder and question if God exists and I get thrilled, because more and more often I see the great mysterious power of God in the world. However there are still moments when I slightly envy Jesus because he knew 100% how God existed, without a doubt. God was as real and as known to Jesus as those whom *we* know best and love the most on this earth are to us.

Because of that knowledge, because of that confidence, even though he was tempted in the desert, *he* would not succumb to the devil's games. We would not be able to relate to Jesus and feel so close to him if he did not feel tempted, just as every other human can be. But the example he set is that the more time you spend talking with God - calling to God - seeking connection with that power - the clearer the relationship is going to be. The clearer the relationship, the easier it will be *not* to give in to temptation and fall prey to that which is not good for us.

Our Old Testament lesson from Deuteronomy says, “. . . we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors; the Lord heard our voice . . .” in the Psalm we read, “When they call to me, I will answer them . . .” and in our Epistle, “. . . the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’” It seems turning to God and calling on that truth out loud in times of need is an essential part of faith. The thought being that the words of our mouths match what is going on in our hearts.

Now that is called *integrity!* When we are free to speak what our hearts feel. Have you noticed how rare that can be at times? There are so many moments when we don’t say what we are thinking for whatever reason. It is only with a true trusted friend that you can share all that is in your heart openly, “no holds barred”. And that is the only way a life in relationship with God can be.

God *is* a part of our whole being – whether we acknowledge it or not. God is part of our conscious efforts and our unconscious thoughts! And, what’s more - God is a part of all we do, whether *he* likes it or not! What we do, what we think, we drag God into it as well! Luckily, he is pure Grace, as well.

When we finally recognize that God is perhaps more aware of our thoughts and actions than we are ourselves, we might just start to think differently about our lives. We can try to tune into that truth – that God is in us, around us, loving us, and wanting to guide us – or we can live a very strange life where we try to deny the power of the subconscious and unconscious.

I think even the hardest of atheists would talk freely about Freud’s psychoanalytic theory of personality. Most people have some interest in the human mind, and they realize that there are parts of our own human existence that we don’t see, but it has influence on our lives. And the more we come to become conscious these parts, the better we are at taking responsibility for our lives and thriving!

I believe that God is deeply a part of all that. And the more we call on God to be deeply a part of our lives and motivations, the more we shall see God. The better we will know that mysterious power which guides us to love each other – to find the God that is reflected in each other and to be unified in that knowledge.

When we recognize that there is no place in this existence that we can go and God will not be there, and it is all good – we live a different life. When we welcome God into our hearts and our thoughts, it is hard to hang on to fears and hatred, lies and darkness. When we call on God, as we call for help and guidance, when our thoughts match our words, then there *is* a power which puts our small lives in perspective.

If we focus on our faith and our hopes, and not concentrate on the fears and the thoughts of hopelessness, we have a light that we can focus on – which cuts through the

darkness. If we call for God's guidance and not give the devil the attention he was asking for from Jesus – we find a path out of fear.

And we return to Jesus. Jesus who knew God so well, Jesus who was strong enough even in one of his weakest human moments to resist all forms of temptation, Jesus as the best way to understand who God is, we return to his life and say we belong to him. We follow his life and teachings because his life was always one of compassion. And Paul was saying in his scriptures that God was the same compassionate savior whether you were a Jew or Greek. There is no distinction between who believes – you call on God and you will be saved. If you recognize the truth in your heart and your mouth reflects your heart – God *will* rescue and honor you!

The truth is, integrity is essential to living a fulfilled life, and it is a lifelong task for some. There are those people who just know who they are, and live their lives with integrity until their last breath. But for some of us, we are pulled hither and yon with temptations to be someone else. We see people and wish we looked more like them, we see things and wish we had that, we experience injustice and we want the power to change things right now, there are thousands of ways each day to feel dissatisfied with ourselves and worry that we aren't OK.

Lent is the time of year when we are called to look within and find that Christ is there and always was, and then we see that we are more than OK – we are beloved and considered precious by a God who knows us better than we know ourselves. And that God will protect us from humiliation. We may fall, and God may allow us to fall, but we will rise even after we fall – because Jesus has been there before, and is in us. When we can find the courage to call on him, admit that we know him, are known by him and love him, we will be protected!

We may not be richer or more beautiful, we may not be more popular or powerful, but we will have integrity. The power of integrity is amazing. Integrity grants us peace, contentment, joy, security, hope and much more – because it is only when you know your life is on a foundation of integrity – when your thoughts begin to match up to your actions - that is when the train is riding smoothly on the tracks of faith – you aren't confused anymore – you are safe and aware. And whatever benefits come from that may not be instantaneous – but they will be sure!

Amen