

2 Thessalonians 2:1-8, 13-17 and Exodus 3:1-15
Pentecost 22C (Proper 27C)
November 10, 2019

Called by Name

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Names are important. If we want to get someone's attention, calling their name works a lot better than "Hey you!" We see with Moses. He's minding his own business, tending his sheep, when he sees a curious sight ... a bush ... that's on fire ... but NOT being consumed. "*That's odd,*" he must've thought. Then, even more odd, he hears his name being called from the bush, (Exodus 3:4) "*Moses, Moses!*" That got his attention ... and if not, the next words certainly did, (Exodus 3:6) "*I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.*" Then, having his attention, God calls him to free His people from Egypt.

Names are important ... like anyone, God calls us by name too. We are part of a long list of believers ... going back to Moses and beyond ... who as God's children (2 Thessalonians 3:13) "*... beloved by the Lord, because God chose (us) as the first fruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.*"

But, being called by name by our Father in heaven doesn't mean we're now on easy street, living in the lap of luxury as we wait in joyful hope for Christ's return. We are called by name to serve Him in this world as we wait in joyful hope for Christ's return. We might not mind hearing God call our name, but, as we hear Him calling us by name to serve Him, we also join a long line of faithful saints who are, at times – anxious, nervous, unsure of God's call to us.

Look at Moses ... sure he was afraid to look at God when he saw that amazing sight on Mount Horeb. But I bet he was also pretty excited that God called him by name. Until that is, he heard what God was calling him to do. "*Moses, I want you to go back to Egypt. And I want you*

to go to Pharaoh and say, 'Let my people go.'" The excitement vanishes in an instant ... *"Uh God, um ... Pharaoh is like the most powerful guy in the world. He has soldiers and chariots and spears and shields. I'm not sure little old me is the right guy for the job. Besides, um, remember how I left Egypt? I'm not exactly on speaking terms with Your people either."* Despite God's presence in the bush, Moses, the mighty man of God ... grew anxious, nervous, and uncertain.

The Thessalonians in Paul's day were also an anxious, nervous, and uncertain lot. They knew from God's Word that Jesus would return, on the Day of the Lord, to judge the living and the dead. They knew from God's Word that when He returned, He'd be taking all those who believed into His heavenly kingdom. However, they'd forgotten some other parts of God's Word ... like when Jesus said, **(Matthew 24:4-5)** *"See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray."* Having not held firmly to all of God's Word, they began listening to some of these deceivers ... who shook their faith by telling them that *"the day of the Lord has come... and you've missed it!"* They'd been led astray by teachers who taught from their own spoken words or written letters – not from God's chosen servants of His Word. Deceived, their faith was shaken. They became alarmed. Their anxiety rose. Their nerves frazzled. Uncertainty set in.

This problem has been with the church throughout its history as Satan has used unscrupulous teachers to sow seeds of doubt into God's children. Doubt which can, if left unchecked, destroy faith. In the early days false teaching about Jesus' true divinity and the personhood of the Holy Spirit led many astray ... God's faithful teachers countered with the Creeds we recite to this day. Later church leaders abused God's children with false teaching stressing the need to earn God's favor and salvation through works and deeds ... God's faithful teachers implemented reforms based on the truth of God's Word which form the basis of our teaching today. But even today,

Satan is still at work ... leading God's people astray as he seeks to twist and contort God's Word using sleight-of-hand techniques that take our eyes off the truth found only in God's Word.

There are popular teachers and novelists who appeal to our desire to be healthy and wealthy ... who will misuse God's Word to teach others health and wealth is a sign of real faith and God's love for you – this “Prosperity Gospel” causes anxiety, nervousness, and uncertainty in those who never seem to be able to get ahead.

Others pick and choose parts of God's Word to support of their personal political, lifestyle, or business agenda while ignoring other parts which provide necessary context to understand what God truly desires for His people. They'll emphasize one part while excluding others.

On the one hand, they'll overemphasize Jesus' teachings on love and mercy while neglecting His equally important Word on sin, repentance, and holy living. We see this as some in the church, claiming to believe in God's Word, also wallow in the unrepentant sin of pre-marital sex, adultery, and modern interpretations of marriage ... leading to eternal death.

While, on the flipside, others forget about God's love and mercy for all mankind. They simply swing the judgment hammer against anyone who doesn't look, talk, or act like they do – condemning them all... even as they deny their own sin which also condemns them.

Through false teachers Satan tries to lead us astray in many ways. And it's usually not through obvious lies. Often, it actually sounds good. It might include God's Word in some way.

This is how the spiral into sin all began in the first place. Satan, the Prince of Deception, deceived Adam and Eve by subtly taking God's Word out of context saying, **(Genesis 3:1)** “*Did God really say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’*” And he added, **(Genesis 3:4)** “*You will not surely die.*” He put just enough doubt into Eve's mind that she grew anxious, her mind was shaken. However, had she listened to the Word of God, and not the twisted word of Satan,

she would've remembered God said, (Genesis 2:16) *"...of the tree of the knowledge of good evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat, you shall surely die."* God's Word was pretty clear. Yet she listened, not to God, but to the Deceiver and fell into sin and death.

Yet God our Father, filled with infinite mercy and grace, longed to save His creation from sin and death. God sent His Son, the Word made Flesh, into the world to save it from Satan's lies. Throughout His ministry, Jesus spoke His Word. He pointed out sin and its horrible effects ... for example, in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus where the sinful, unbelieving rich man was sentenced to eternity in the unquenchable fire of hell. Meanwhile, to the repentant thief, crucified with Jesus for a lifetime of crime, the Word made Flesh said, (Luke 24:43) *"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."* Then Jesus died, giving up His spirit as He cried out for all to hear, (John 19:30) *"It is finished."* By His Word alone, the Son of God told all mankind, everywhere and across all time, including today, that Satan's deceptions will have no effect on God's promise of eternal life for all who trust in His Word and believe in His promises. Rising to new life three days later, He destroyed Satan's power over mankind.

God knew what Moses needed to relieve his anxiety, doubt, and uncertainty ... Moses needed the assurance in God's Word, (Exodus 3:12, 15) *"I will be with you ... and tell my people, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.'"* Thus assured, Moses stood firm, as he answered God's call to him.

God knows what we need too ... we need the truth found only in His Word. St. Paul exhorts us today saying, (2 Thessalonians 2:15) *"... stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter."* When God calls us by name to do His will in the world, and Satan begins to sow anxiety and uncertainty in our minds through his deceptions, take hold of God's strong Word in faith. Then, (Colossians 3:15-16) *"... let the*

peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.”

None of us, not even Moses, can stand firm on our own. It's only with the true Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit received in Baptism, that we can stand firm against Satan and his co-workers. But Baptism is not the end of the story. It's the start! In Baptism, God has called us by name to *“joyfully proclaim God's Word.”* In faith, we turn to God's Word ... we study His Word regularly and hear His call to us. Then, hearing Him, we go to Him in prayer, asking Him to strengthen us for the task ahead. We join together as the Body of Christ to be nourished and fed in worship and through the Sacraments. Nourished and emboldened by His Word, we go out to *“enthusiastically share Christ's love”* without fear knowing that God is with us! We lift others up in prayer. We share the gospel by speaking the truth of God's Word ... building up, not tearing down. We perform works of faith in love for those in need. In all these ways and more, God calls us by name to boldly call to others that one day, through His gospel, all of us will obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. And when He returns on the Day of the Lord as promised, He'll take us all into His kingdom.

I pray for you and me, as Paul prayed for the Thessalonians, **(1 Thessalonians 2:16-17)** *“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God our Father, who love(s) us and (gives) us eternal comfort and good hope through grace – comfort (our) hearts and establish them in every good work and word.”* Amen.

James Kent