

God is Calling YOU Out!

Sermon, January 15, 2017

Texts: Isaiah 42:1-9; I Corinthians 1:1-9

So, what comes to your mind when you read the sermon title this morning, "God is Calling You Out!"? Some of you may read that and think of a divine Umpire looking down from heaven jerking His divine thumb and yelling "Yer out!" ... as He makes a damning call of judgment on something you've done or some boundary you've crossed. Others of you may read that and think of God *challenging* you in some way; He's "calling you out" to take a stand or defend an issue or a principle or a person, even yourself. One "calls someone out" by challenging someone to a duel or a fight ... which is something I first experienced in the seventh grade.

I was a somewhat naïve twelve-year-old from a semi-rural neighborhood entering the regional Stetson Junior High School, and there were some tough kids in that crowd from the less-bucolic districts in the town of West Chester. I developed a romantic interest in a particularly attractive young lady named Pat, which to my delight was reciprocated; unfortunately, Pat had a former boyfriend who didn't like being a former boyfriend ... and he was an EIGHTH grader, and on the wrestling team, and (*if memory serves*) one of the captains of that wrestling team. To make a long story short, Larry sent an "emissary" (*one of his friends*) to "call me out" ... in this junior high school version of throwing down the gauntlet or slapping one's face with a glove, he was challenging me to meet him behind Briggs Sporting Goods store at 9:30 Saturday morning, where we would do battle. I was nonplussed and very unnerved by it all, to say the least ... for one thing, this whole girl-boy relationship thing was really new to me, but the most unnerving is that I had never been in a fight, other than the harmless roughhousing with my brothers and neighborhood friends. Well, call me chicken, but my mama didn't raise no fool ... I just didn't show up at Briggs that Saturday, and the whole thing eventually blew over as time passed on. In fact, Larry and I wound up on somewhat friendly terms over the years, teammates in football. But that was my first (*and, really, only!*) experience with being "called out;" I was challenged to a fight, called to take a stand for the "love" I professed for the fair damsel Pat.

When you are being "called out," you are being called to show up and stand up for your honor, your convictions, and/or to defend a point or an issue. You may remember Elijah *calling out* the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel ... in that delightful story from I Kings 18, Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to a contest. "*Let's set up two altars with two bulls upon those altars, then let us call on your god and my God and whichever God answers, that's the true God.*" Ostensibly, he was calling out the prophets of Baal, but in doing so, he was actually calling out Baal. And you know the story; the prophets of Baal prayed and danced and cut themselves and did all kinds of things to get their "god's" attention, but their altar remained untouched. Toward evening, Elijah walked up (*after having the altar dowsed with gallons of water!*), said a brief prayer, and "WHOOMPH" ... fire came down and consumed the bull, the altar and left a huge crater. In short, God *beat* Baal!

And then some of you may have read that sermon title and your first thought was of the original definition of the Greek word our Bibles translate as the English word "Church." Uh, probably not. If anyone IS in that latter group, good for you! You were probably paying attention during an Inquirers' class, as we go over this little Greek lesson each time we meet with potential new members who want to learn what it means to be part of the "church."

The Greek "ekklesia" was the most common word used in the New Testament to designate the worshipping congregation. Literally, the word means "the *called-out* ones." It comes from the root verb "καλεω," kaleo, which means, "to call". It was not a "religious" word; it simply was the common word used to designate any sort of assembly, any group of people "called" together for a common purpose. When Paul writes here in I Corinthians, "*To the church of God in Corinth,*" he uses that word "ekklesia." It's actually a little more poetic in the original ... Paul is actually writing, in so many words, "*Paul, called out to be an apostle ... to the called out ones in Corinth.*" The word "ekklesia" occurs in one hundred and fifteen places in the New Testament. One hundred and thirteen times it is rendered by English translators as "church;" the remaining two times it is translated as the more secular term "assembly." "Church" is an interesting choice of a word for the English translation, because it really *isn't* a literal translation; it's really more of a paraphrase. The lineage of our English word "church" does not come from the Greek "ekklesia."

"Church" goes back to the Scottish "kirk," (*not to be confused with the captain of the starship Enterprise*), which comes from the Dutch "kerk," which comes from the German "Kirche," which comes from the Greek "kuriachos," which means "those who belong to the 'Κυριος' (Kurios), the 'Lord.'" Interestingly, the actual Greek word "kuriachos" from which we derive our English word church appears in the New Testament only twice, and in neither case is it translated "church." It appears once in I Corinthians 11:20 where it refers to "*the Lord's supper,*" and once again in Revelation 1:10 where it refers to "*the Lord's day.*"

But as the theology of this new "ekklesia", this new assembly, matured and jelled, it became clear that the One who had "kaleo-ed" them together, the One who called out this assembly, was the same Lord Who called them to be His own; after all, He had bought them with a price (*see I Corinthians 6:20*). So, both of these words (*ekklesia and kuriachos*) come into play when we say the word "Church." The "church", then, is those who are *called out* by God to be His own ... all those who "belong to the Lord", those called out by Him to be His people, and as His people, they are called to stand for, defend and promote all that is good and holy and right and honorable.

Properly speaking, the word "church" doesn't refer to a building or abomination ... er, denomination. The early Puritans referred to the church *building* as the Meeting House. We don't "go" to church; the "church" (*those called to belong to the Lord*) goes to the Meeting House; this is the place where the people of God, the church, meets together, AND where the church meets God, in worship. God has called us out, and He has called us here. We have been summoned, called, almost subpoenaed ... subpoenaed as witnesses to God's glory, love and holiness ... to mix my metaphors, we are called to the stand, and we are called to learn how to take our stand for Him as witnesses of His reality, love and grace in the real life courtroom of the world where our faith is always on trial.

Paul continues to write to the Corinthian *ekklesia*, "... to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy..." "Sanctified" is from the Latin "sanctus" which means "holy," or "set apart." We have been *set apart* in Christ Jesus, who in calling us has not only made us His own, but made us holy ... purified, consecrated and set apart for God and God's service. This is what the word "holy" means, to be set apart for God. He is the One who makes us holy. It has little if anything to do with *our* qualities or performance. It has everything to do with to Who we belong, the One Who has called and claimed us. Whenever we affirm, "*I believe in the Holy Catholic Church*" this comes into play. **HOLY:** The church's holiness is derived, not intrinsic; it is holy not because anyone IN the church is holy, but because we belong to, are associated with, set apart for (and by) the One Who is holy. The word **CATHOLIC** comes from the Greek *katholikos*, which means *universal*, which means this holy assembly of called-out ones transcends all boundaries of nationality, all boundaries of race, language, and culture, and even all boundaries of time. **CHURCH** ... those who belong to the Kurious, the Lord.

Like the Corinthians, we have been set aside for God in Jesus Christ, set apart for holy purposes. On one hand, it is a done deal ... but on the other hand, our sanctification and holiness is a process that takes place. C.S. Lewis, in **Mere Christianity**, likens it to an infection that takes over our bodies. He calls it God's good infection, an infectious holiness. We have been infected with the presence and goodness and holiness of Christ Himself. You know how an infection works; more often than not, we don't even know an infection has happened until we start displaying symptoms. The longer our association with the One Who has called us, the more His divine infection spreads within us and we find ourselves responding, behaving, and thinking in ways that display and spread this good "infection."

So we are sanctified, set apart, called to be holy, and infected by the *good* infection of holiness. The purpose of this assembly, the reason we are called out, is to incubate and grow and spread and fester that good infection among us so that we may go from here and infect the world about us! Holiness is contagious! Goodness is contagious! Kindness is contagious! Love is contagious, as is graciousness! The more it is exhibited and practiced, the faster it spreads and catches on! Sadly, cynicism is also contagious, as is hatred, and unkindness, and hate, and anger, and vulgarity. Our primary duty is to be God's people, called to be His holy ones, consecrated and commissioned and empowered by Him to go into the world as His infectious representatives; this is what it means to be the Church, the *ekklesia*, the called out ones, the *Kuriachos*, the ones who belong to the Lord.

One last point: "belonging to the Lord" means not only that we are not our own, it also means we are not ON our own. Those in Corinth and those of us here in Warwick are certainly not the only ones called by God. We belong to a larger community that extends beyond this place, the catholic church ... wherever we find people gathering to call on God in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, there we will find an extension of the assembly. To all these Paul writes "... together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Grace and peace from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ. We've received that. We are called out to be bearers of the grace we've received, God's grace, wherever we go. We are called to be bearers of the peace we've received, God's peace, wherever we go. We do not go from this place sustained by our own resources. We go empowered by God's Spirit, privileged to be bearers of His grace and peace wherever we go.

And that's why God called YOU out!