

May 04, 2025

1 Peter 2:21-25

# “To This You Have Been Called”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
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Decatur, Illinois 62526

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ and my dear Confirmation Class,

We stand in awe before the empty tomb of Jesus our Savior. The great Shepherd of the sheep has paid the price for sin and death at the cross and has risen from the dead so that we might live. Thank God that we share in the victory of Easter! The living Shepherd has called us from our aimless and miserable wandering in this fallen world and has made us the sheep of his pasture. We rejoice in the participation that we have in Jesus' eternal life, in the comfort of his steadfast love, and in the peace of his protection, in the safety of his guidance, and in the hope of the paradise that is ours in him! **To This You Have Been Called.** Only be careful that you do not neglect or reject that calling!

Indeed! As we still find ourselves in the Easter season we stand in awe before the empty grave of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. What joy - what peace - and what hope as the Easter message of "He lives!" removes from our hearts the guilt of our consciences and the fear of death and hell. But the Shepherd of our souls has called us not only to the joy of our salvation, but also to the fellowship [participation] of his sufferings. And here is the hard part of what it means to be a Christian and to be confirmed in the faith. Our path is like the path of Jesus. You have been called to be different from all the rest in your baptism and to share in the sufferings of the cross that you may have life and the strength to reject the enticements of what you know to be wrong. But, before you close your ears to the sufferings that are yours, you also need to hear the words of Paul in Romans 8:18, "... I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us."

**To This You Have Been Called.** You have been called to a life down here that is not considered to be glorious by the standards of this unbelieving world. But do any of us really want to be like this unbelieving world? They are like the story of a biologist's experiment with "processional caterpillars." On the rim of a clay pot that held a living plant, the biologist lined up the caterpillars so that the leader was head-to-tail with the last caterpillar. The tiny creatures circled the rim of the pot for a full week. Not once did any one of them break away to go over to the plant and eat. Eventually, all the caterpillars died from exhaustion and starvation. That is where the standards of this unbelieving world take us - to a mindless walk that avoids the plant of Jesus and dies from exhaustion and starvation.

Such have no idea where they are going. They do not see the way ahead of them. Nor do they care. They cannot know for certain where it will end and if there is something after. Nor do they really know themselves. And we must be very careful that we do not dupe ourselves into that sort of thinking where we follow the procession of what is wrong and loveless by allowing the pursuit of what we want to dominate our lives so that we no longer look to the plant - forgetting Jesus. Consider all that is at stake and how there is nothing down here that is more important than what you have in the forgiveness of sins. In the words of one Lutheran preacher:

Because Jesus died for my sins, rose again, and was glorified by the Father, therefore, believing in Him, I have through Him the free and full forgiveness of all my sins; and when my last hour draws near and I must leave the scenes of this earth, my soul will not go into everlasting darkness, but will be ushered into the heavenly home. On the great day of

resurrection my body will be reunited with the soul and glorified, and thus I shall live in endless bliss with my Redeemer forever and ever.

Do you see what's at stake? This is what the unbelieving world and the devil wish to take away from us by having us be like the processional caterpillars. These work together to tap into your bad desires to remove you from the paradise that is yours. They want you to mindlessly follow them into starvation and death. They want you to selfishly love yourself and the down here so much that you trade all the eternal gifts that are found in Jesus for a moment in time. They want you to pursue your own gain, your greatness, your own enjoyment, your own honor. As Paul writes: "... they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ (Phil. 2:21)."

But the Christian, having been cleansed in baptism, is not a slave to their own sinful desires that they maliciously pursue satisfying them. They are not like those who mindlessly follow the others at the top of the pot and miss the plant. They are slaves of what is right and love and eternal life. The Christian is in a battle where he desires to live in Christ regardless of what the sinful flesh desires and wishes to embrace. Because Christ has given us every good gift in his cross and empty tomb, we fight to overcome our selfishness and we willingly suffer by denying ourselves.

Living in Christ and denying yourself the things you know are wrong, so that faith is not destroyed, is no easy thing. It means rising above the earthly and temporary things of this life to be in a holy and close relationship with Jesus. What will you do with the gifts that have been given to you in Christ? Will this be the last Sunday that I see you in church for a long time - forever? Will you go off in your directions and leave all this behind as if it were nothing? Will you value the Word of the Gospel and the Sacraments in such a way that you will make your Christian identity your priority? Again, in the words of a Lutheran preacher:

May we go out in the strength which God supplies, pledging ourselves in unswerving allegiance to Christ and His cause. Let us strive to be outstanding Christians, determined followers of the crucified but now glorified Lord, before whom the unbelieving world will stop in awe and admiration. Ever mindful of the words of the apostle: "For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised (2 Cor. 5:14-15)."

**To This You Have Been Called.** We are no longer sheep going astray. Thus, do not go astray. By God's undeserved kindness we have returned to the Shepherd of our souls and his sufferings are to be realized in our lives. Will we not then suffer with him by denying our sinful desires since he nailed our sin to his cross? We have been linked by faith to Christ, the living Lord. As he has risen from the dead, he has freed us from the death of sin. We are no longer slaves of sin but slaves of what is right and loving.

We live our life in the joy of our salvation. But you may ask: "Where do I go to receive the strength to carry out such a holy commitment? Where do I gain the necessary power to tear myself away from my

self-centered life? How may I be torn from my sinful desires that seek to destroy the gifts of Jesus? How can Jesus really help me? Where can I find him and his strength to overcome?"

The answer is found only in the love of the cross. The answer is found in the forgiveness of sins. Jesus is with us in his cross and empty tomb. The treasures he brings are found in the means of grace. In the promises of the gospel and in the washing of our baptism and the love of Christ in the giving and offering of his body and blood for the forgiveness of all our sins we will find the strength to make the journey. Without him and where he is found in the public preaching of the church and the administration of the sacraments - without him - disaster awaits. Thus the importance of growing in the places where you find him - such as church and Bible class - is not a maybe but a must! Once again, in the words of a Lutheran preacher:

Fasten your eyes upon the blessed Redeemer stretched out upon the tree of shame, suffering for the sins of humanity, also for your sins and my sins; and as you stand there in holy awe and adoration, mindful of the words of St. Paul with reference to that innocent Sufferer: "He loved me and gave Himself for me," the Spirit of God will pour out into your souls not only the sacred impulse to serve that beloved Savior in holy fear and consecration, but also the very strength and help you need to carry out that God-pleasing resolve will be given you.

**To This You Have Been Called** - as our text says: "... because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps." And where did the sufferings of our Savior take him and where do his sufferings take us? His sufferings take us with him to his glory and everlasting life!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott