

## Sermon for January 23, 2000

Text: 2 Timothy 1:1-7

### Theme: God calls leaders through people

The entire Scriptures is a record of God providing leaders for his people – leaders in the home, leaders in the church, leaders in the community. Because God is a gracious and a caring God He knows that His people flounder if they do not have good leadership. God continues to provide leaders for His church today in order that His plan of salvation can be carried out. It is the will of God that all people everywhere will know His love and the undeserved forgiveness of sins that comes through the blood of Jesus Christ. It is part of God's plan that this message is carried by people – human flesh and blood people – who themselves know the weight of sin in their lives and also know the joy of having Jesus as the One who died for them and who gives them the sure hope of life forever after death

Throughout the Scriptures we see how God has used different methods to raise up leaders. He called Moses with a burning bush. He used a large fish to recruit Jonah as a missionary. He appeared to Saul (Paul) in a blinding light. At times He used dreams and visions. It is an interesting record in the Scriptures about the various ways that God used to call individual people to serve as leaders for His people. In all of these different ways, God also used other people. After the blinding light on the road to Damascus it was necessary for Paul to meet with people for a time in order to learn about the Christian faith. God still uses this method to raise up people today. In our text for today, the Apostle Paul says that he is an apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will. Paul also says that he serves with a clear conscience as his ancestors did. The ancestors of Paul were an influence in his life. He refers to Timothy as his son in the faith. Somehow God used Paul as an instrument to help Timothy to grow in his faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of his sins. There are also references to Timothy's grandmother and his mother Eunice. So, in the life of Timothy there were a number of people involved who helped him not only to develop in his faith, but also then to be called into the ministry of the church. There are references in the text to the laying on of hands. At some time in the life of Timothy the larger church recognized that God had called him to serve as a leader, and set him aside, or consecrated him to serve as a leader in the church.

*[At this point in the sermon you can mention the people who influenced you in becoming a pastor or deacon in the church.]*

(In my own life certainly the greatest influence for me was my father who was a pastor and my grandfather who was a pastor, as well as my uncle and older brother. Seeing these people in the ministry, travelling around with my father as a young boy when he visited people and gave them private communion, certainly was a great influence in my life. But besides the family, there were other people who would make comments to me and say that I should consider becoming a pastor.)

Today it is important that in every congregation, members look around and identify people who are potential leaders for the church, either pastors or deacons

Every Christian is called by God to faith. This call comes through the working of the Holy Spirit in the preaching and teaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This call for all Christians to be servants comes through their baptism and is reaffirmed constantly in the body and blood of Jesus in holy communion. Every child of God is called by God to serve Him and share the good news of Jesus Christ. Every one who has been called into the faith also has to ask the question, “Does God want me to serve as a leader in the church?” Every Christian needs to ask themselves that question and we need to ask each other this question. Does God want you to serve as a leader in the church – either as a pastor or a deacon? Not every one is able to answer ‘yes’ because not everyone is called to be a leader, but the question should be asked of everyone.

What are the qualifications that a person should look for in himself or herself, or in other people? It would be a mistake to look for special abilities and intelligence. In fact, it almost seems as though one of the qualifications necessary to be a leader in the church is to be convinced that you are not qualified and that your own abilities do not give you the right to become a leader in the church. What is really essential for anyone to be a leader in the church is that they recognize their own sinfulness, their own unworthiness and their total dependence upon the blood of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. This is necessary because the real mission of the ministry of the church is to proclaim this beautiful sweet gospel of Jesus Christ. Moses certainly wasn’t qualified to be a leader. In fact, he said he couldn’t speak. Saul (Paul) hated and killed Christians. Certainly he was not qualified. Jonah ran away. Isaiah was a man of unclean lips. In our text for today Paul says it is the Spirit that gives us power, love and self-control. If there is anything we need to look for in a person to be a leader is that the spirit of God has given them the strength and the power to serve and a tenderness of love and care for other people, as well as some self-control. In leadership it is very important to have the help of the Holy Spirit to be able to control ourselves in time of panic or depression or passion.

How do I know if God has called me to be a leader in the church? I am not sure if there is any time when one who serves as a pastor or deacon in the church can be absolutely, positively sure that God wants them to be a leader in the church. In fact, it seems as though all of our ministry is filled with some doubt and apprehension and we need to be convinced time and again by God that it is His will that we serve in leadership positions in the church. Certainly one way of finding it out is to test it. If the Spirit of God has laid upon your heart the call to become a leader in the church, then you should talk about it with other people and test it out to see if they affirm it or not. The second test would be to take the training offered by the Church. The final test comes when we are actually in the

ministry and can determine whether or not God uses us to communicate the Gospel to other people.

In our text for today, Paul says that he is thankful to God for having called Timothy to be a leader in the church. It is important in all our congregations that we publicly express our thanks and praise to God whenever He provides us with a pastor or deacon to serve in the church. It is this attitude of thankfulness for the office of the public ministry that encourages more people to want to consider whether or not God is calling them into service in the church. Of all the things we can do with our life, there is really nothing that has more honour or is more of a privilege than spending our whole life proclaiming to other people the powerful message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ – changing people’s lives by proclaiming to them the name of Jesus in a caring way.

It is the very nature of faith itself that it comes from outside of us as a gift from God. It never comes up from within us. This faith is brought to other people through people speaking to them the message of salvation in Jesus Christ. To have the privilege of being an instrument of God in bringing the most powerful thing into the lives of other people is certainly an honour and a privilege. It is something that should be considered by everyone who has been called by God into the Christian faith. The whole purpose for God in raising up leaders is so that the good news can be proclaimed. We do not teach people ten ways of how they can be saved. It is not a message ‘if you believe in Jesus you will be saved’. It is the message ‘You have been saved, believe it!’ When Christ on the cross said, “It is finished,” He meant that it is finished. The total price has been paid for the forgiveness of our sins. So now we proclaim to people something that has been completed and done. Your sins have been forgiven. Believe it because it is true.

There are people on this earth who do not know that their sins have been forgiven. There are people who know and do not believe that their sins have been forgiven. For both of them, they need to hear again and again the message of the love of God that is unconditional and unending, that comes through His Son, our Lord and Saviour.

Everyone called by God through the Spirit to this faith is now sent to speak this to others. However, it is necessary that there be those called to be leaders in the public ministry in order to proclaim this on behalf of the whole church and in order to equip all the members to be missionaries proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ. It is essential for the life and the mission of the church that there be those who are called and placed into the public ministry. It is not an optional matter for the church to have pastors and deacons. It is essential to the mission and ministry of the church that there be those called and placed into this position through the laying on of hands. We live at a time in our church when there is a real shortage of leaders in the public ministry. There is no doubt that our church

is suffering because of this lack of leadership. At this time, as at any time, it is essential for those of us in the church – grandmothers, mothers, those of us already in the office — to look at those that we know in the church and to encourage people to consider the call from the Holy Spirit to serve as leaders in the kingdom of God.

Prayer is an essential part of the process. Our Lord Jesus says the harvest is great, pray that there be more labourers. It is essential in our personal life, and in our public life, that we constantly include prayers to the throne of God, that Jesus who sits at the right hand of the Father would continue to carry out His ministry of sending pastors and teachers and evangelists for the equipping of the saints to carry out the mission of the church.

Pray for yourself. Pray that God would make it clear to you whether or not you should consider the call into the public ministry. If God has provided you with a faithful pastor, be sure to thank God and to thank him. If God has called you into this ministry, also thank God, because it is by His grace and His mercy that any of us are allowed to serve in this wonderful privilege of being partners with God in proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. If you have been called by God, you cannot wait until everything is in place, or before you have all the abilities, before you accept the call. It is important that when the call comes, you accept it and say, “Yes Lord, here I am, send me, send me.” God never asks us to do something without also providing us with the means to do it. God never called anyone into the ministry of the church without also providing them with the strength, the power, the love and the self-control that is necessary for them to carry out their leadership roles. God very seldom provides this ahead of time, but He provides these gifts and He keeps His promises as we serve Him and as we accept the call.

May the Holy Spirit move all of you to consider a call from God to serve as a leader in the church. May the Holy Spirit also move all of you to look around, if you have not been called by God, that you would identify someone in the congregation who should consider a call from God to serve in the church. God will answer our prayers as He has since the Lord Jesus lived and walked on this earth, He will always raise up leaders because He will not leave His people helpless, floundering around without leadership. God will do this not because we deserve it, but because He truly wants to carry out His plan of salvation. He will continue to do it the way He has always done it, and that is through people in His church — all this so that more people can know His love, the forgiveness of sins and the sure hope of life forever in Jesus Christ. Amen