

“Called”

Rev’d. Tanya Stormo Rasmussen

Congregational Church of Hollis, U.C.C.

Confirmation/Baptism/New Member Sunday

3 June, 2018

1 Samuel 3:1-10

2 Corinthians 4:5-12

This is a very significant moment—for all of us at the Congregational Church of Hollis, but especially for our confirmands and for those being baptized and welcomed as full members into this faith and family of Christ Jesus. And so, while I hope all of you can take something away from the service this morning, I especially hope that those of you who are going to stand in front of the congregation this morning will hear and remember what I’m going to say. It’s the message that our sacraments of baptism—which confirmation and church membership affirm—and communion convey. There are three main points I’d like for you to remember:

1. You are known, and loved.

Before you knew your own name, you were known and loved. Before your parents knew your name, or any of your special qualities, before they knew the ways that you bless the world and the ways that you challenge them and others—God knew you. And God loved you. Because God, the Creator of universes and everything that is meaningful, is the One who dreamed of you and decided the world needs one of you. God gave you all the gifts and qualities that make you special and unique, that make you precious to your family and friends—before any of them became enchanted with you, God already was.

God knows you, and God loves you—couldn’t love you more, and won’t love you less. That’s the promise and message of Jesus’ life.

And God will *always* love you, even when you mess up, which you’re bound to do because you’re human. That’s what Jesus came to make clear: He came to show us *how* to love and how to live the best way possible, but Jesus loves us even when we mess up, when we fall short, when we sin, when we hurt ourselves or others by what we do or what we fail to do.

You are known, and loved. And always will be, for all eternity.

2. Life can be hard—but you are not alone.

As Samuel discovered when God called to him in the dark of night, God is and has been with us—long before we’re aware of who or where God is. The Spirit of God is what gives us our very breath, and that’s how close God always is to us—the last breath we took, and our very next breath.

Sometimes, it can be hard to recognize God’s presence with us—which is why life in community is so important. It’s in this church community here that we learn about how to

look for God in the world, where to search God out in our personal life and activities. So stay connected to your church community—this living Body of Christ in today’s world.

The Apostle Paul, who wrote the letter that included our New Testament lesson, didn’t pretend that being a follower of Jesus would be easy. The world will not congratulate us, or make it easy for us to try to live like he did—caring about the poor; being a voice for the unpopular and reminding the world that they, too, are beloved children of God; challenging the powers and voices of this world when they pretend that military force and material wealth are the most important indicators of greatness, and anytime any individual or group diminishes the full humanity of anyone. Those early Christians were being persecuted by the Roman government, which was very focused on military power and wealth, and they treated people who did not agree with them or believe like they did as if they were less worthy people.

But here’s what Paul wrote, encouraging the Christian believers to remember that the power of the Holy Spirit living within them was stronger than anything life or other people could throw at them: “⁸ We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.”

Finally: **3. You are called.**

God has a purpose for your life, and a mission for you to fulfill, with God as your helper and your guide. God’s purpose for your life was fashioned with your very creation—and at its very core is love: to be loved, and to love others as God loves you, in whatever way that becomes possible.

When God called Samuel’s name that night, the boy had no idea who God was. But he learned that God had a special purpose and plan for his life—and God was going to help him fulfill it. It was a plan and a purpose that would help to bring goodness and hope, health and grace to God’s people.

Not only are you known and loved, but God *calls* you, appoints you, *sends* you because God knows you and is confident that you can do amazing things with her help, and as you work alongside other faithful people. That’s what Samuel learned as he grew up in the Temple. And it’s what Jesus knew as he nurtured a community of disciples and then sent them out in pairs to minister together. And it’s what Paul knew, and what he was trying to teach the Corinthian Christians as he encouraged them to remain strong in the faith of Jesus Christ, whose Holy Spirit was with them as surely as it is with us.

That’s it: **You are known and loved; Life can be hard, but you’re not alone; and You are called.** These are the key themes of the whole of Scripture. These are the messages that our sacred symbols of Baptism and Holy Communion convey to us. And so, may you carry deep within you these three truths as you continue on your journey of life and faith. And may God bless you richly as you move forward. Amen.