

The Call Sign of the Christian Church 4 Easter A

“Those who had been baptized devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” Acts 2:42

A call sign is a signal used for identification by a radio transmitting station or an operator in radio communication with others. WJVL, 99.5, is an example of a call sign. (Allude to walkie-talkies) At church when Jeanette, our parish administrator wants to get a hold of Bill our sexton, she simply calls, “Billy! Are you there?”

In John's gospel, the passage of the Good Shepherd, states, “The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.” Jesus used this figure of speech to connect his role as shepherd in the understanding of his disciples. The disciples were rather dense. They needed plain, simpler language. They did not see that he is the good shepherd who calls his disciples, like sheep, by name. Like sheep therefore, the disciples should follow the voice of their shepherd. God uses a call sign to reach each of us. His voice goes out as a radio signal does and he waits for a response.

C.S. Lewis in his book, The Problem of Pain, states that the highest purpose of humanity is to RESPOND. Human beings do not INITIATE, with God. It is God's prerogative alone to reach out to his creatures. The highest activity for men is to respond to their Creator, who made them for Himself and for His glory. Lewis reflecting on scripture states that God has no needs. It is we as human beings that need Him. Yet, it is God, in His Divine will that chooses to call us by our names.

This is a difficult concept for us as Americans. We are not accustomed to be told we are not needed. Except perhaps when the pink slip comes during a recession! The sheep metaphor is understood better when a roll call is taken in a classroom, a nurse comes out into the doctor's waiting room looking for you or you hear your name called for a table at your favorite restaurant. In each case we respond. We don't barge in but wait until the “call sign” or name is used.

In our first scripture, a type of “call sign” that marks the Christian community gathered is baptism. Those that were baptized

into Christ by water and the Spirit gathered into groups day by day at the temple and then broke bread in the home. The temple was the place in Jewish tradition where teaching took place. The early church initially was made up entirely of Jewish believers that continued with Jewish practice. The Eucharist however took place in the home much like the Passover meal or Seder.

Please notice it was the mark of baptism that identified the “signal” of the early Christian and not the place where they worshipped. The Christian “call sign” was the activity going on as a church and not the place that was emphasized. The early Church had a particular habit that marked the behavior of what came to be known as “Christian.” Let’s see what those four activities were: devotion to the apostle’s teaching, and fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers.

Do you notice the order mentioned in these four activities? There is a reason for that order. The creed we confess each Sunday says, “We believe in one holy, catholic, and apostolic faith.” Without the apostle’s teaching underpinning the life of His Church God knew that it would be a hollow, shallow movement. It is no different than hanging a shelf and putting weight upon it without anchoring the arms that hold up that shelf. Should that verse of the Nicene Creed be edited to read, “...except when it requires us to meet again after church.”

Take a look with me and see what the second activity mentioned was in the early Church. Fellowship is listed second. Why is it so over breaking bread – the holy Eucharist!? Who wrote this Bible anyway? The Encarta dictionary writes that Fellowship is a sharing of experiences, goals, views or common interests. It is a group of like minded people. It is companionship or friendly association. It is the similarity of shared characteristics with others. How would you rate fellowship here at Trinity? Does fellowship reflect well of our entire membership?

A funny cartoon has a parish concluding worship in subdued lighting. Suddenly, the lights are thrown on and people are invited to meet and greet in the social hall. The cartoon next reveals nothing but numbers of bugs in the pews scattering in every direction because of the light. Has the modern church become like bugs that have had the light shown upon them forcing them to look at each other? I am grateful to the efforts of our fellowship team that has shed

some light on our need to spend time with each other after both services.

Fellowship allows Christians to talk about the teaching they have received and share their views. It draws people together to find out that they are pretty much the same people after all.

The last two activities Trinity is quite expert in and has no need of me to preach another ten minutes. Suffice it to say however we have put the last two activities first and the first last. Will Trinity realize that the Eucharist and the prayers are built upon unanchored shelving without the solid food of Holy Scripture and the participation of Christ's members with one another? The order of activity has been reversed from early days. A restoration must take place. Without teaching and fellowship we have only a token church and very little to offer new families. I believe there is always a more efficient way of getting a job done. More light needs to be shed. Less scattering and more coming together must happen. Be praying what God may be saying when he asks you how you wore the mark of baptism. AMEN