

O Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, ... without whose aid and blessing our labors are all in vain, we humbly ask You, regard Your goodness and our need, and bless us, that with firm trust in You we may patiently and cheerfully labor in our various callings: We confess that we are unworthy. But we beseech You, prosper all that we do and say to honor Your name among our many neighbors you have placed in our lives; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen.

The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as He walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to Him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are You staying?" He said to them, "Come and you will see." So they came and saw where He was staying, and they stayed with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter). The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" Nathanael said to Him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." And He said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

In Christ Jesus, the Lamb of God promised of old who bridged the chasm between heaven and this sinful world, dear fellow redeemed:

We have all experienced being chosen and called to fulfill a role of some sort throughout our lives. When we were young our parents would choose us to perform certain chores. Our classmates picked as captains would choose their teams and as they looked upon the student body they called out our names, some sooner than others. Our bosses may choose us for a promotion and call on us to take on new and additional responsibility.

Whenever we answer those calls, we must adjust to the new learning curve, some steeper than others. Some of us who have been chosen from eternity and called by our Lord to follow Him, do not remember any transition like this, since we were called in our infancy and grew up gradually enlightened in the Christian faith. But there are some of you who do remember the transition from the darkness of sin and death to the light of righteousness and life. Regardless of our experiences, we can all take note of the process begun in us: **Chosen and Called We Are Enlightened to Follow Jesus.**

I

As Jesus once reminded the disciples – He chose them, they did not choose Him. It is the same for all who receive the calling to follow our Lord in this life. We can see this with Philip in our text, when Jesus said to him personally: “Follow Me.”, but it was different with John, Andrew, James, Peter and Nathanael. The first four came as a result of hearing John the Baptizer calling Jesus the Lamb of God and Nathanael by hearing Philip declare that Jesus might be the Christ.

They all were still chosen and called, but through the powerful working of the Word of Christ. It was obvious when John and Andrew heard Jesus identified as the Lamb of God, Andrew said to Peter: “We have found the Messiah’ (which means Christ).” Philip said to Nathanael: “We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

Remember how John the Baptizer not only said about Jesus that He was the Lamb of God, but also that He takes away all sin. Our Lord chooses us in His Son from eternity, but then with His Word of grace in Christ He calls us here in time and through faith gives to us the very blessings His Son has secured for all people with His holy precious blood. It is a powerful call, which actually changes our hearts that were dead in sin to be alive in the risen Christ.

I remember being called by my mother and depending on how it was done, it changed my response. If I heard her say “Gah-LENN!” I knew I was disappointing her with some ill behavior, but if she said: Glenn ROBERT, I knew I was being called to account for some past misdeed. But as powerful as those calls can be received from another, nothing can compare to the powerful calling of us by God in His Gospel. In my baptism, I did not process the call that was voiced, but never-the-less the name of God was placed on me, so that I went from being a child of Satan to a child of God.

II

Nathanael was amazed at Jesus’ ability to see and know him from afar so he concludes that Jesus is the Christ indeed. But as Jesus

challenged his understanding of things, He said in return: "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these. ... Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

Jesus, the Son of God and the Son of Man, is the stairway or ladder, which bridges the gap between the Holy God in heaven and the crown of His creation lost in its sin and doomed to eternal death. As Jesus said to Nathanael, he would see the angels, God's messengers, bringing the good news down to us that all our sins are forgiven and that we are accounted to be righteous for Jesus' sake and with joy return to God with our confessions of sin and faith. While we will probably not see and hear these angelic creatures as did the disciples at various times, we still have the message brought to us right where we live. These messages are centered and focused on Christ Jesus, the Lamb of God. For He right now is at the center of the throne of God bearing the five wounds of our eternal redemption, which intercede for us poor sinners, bearing constant witness that the payment for our sins is paid in full.

This is our ongoing enlightening by the Holy Spirit. The word of Christ dwells in us richly through Word and Sacrament. While the disciples were chosen and called, their enlightenment continued. It continued for them during the three years they were intimately instructed by our Lord. It continued by the risen Christ up to His ascension. It continued through and beyond Pentecost to the day of their deaths, which for eleven of them we are told were executed and bore witness to the truth of Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Consider how in our Gospel lesson, after the great catch of fish, Peter said: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Lord." Peter needed further enlightenment, as do we all in this life of struggle. Our natural sinful condition would have us say the same thing as Peter, having Jesus depart until we fix ourselves. But we need Him to draw near to us cleansing us from all our sin.

We confess with Luther this explanation to the Third Article of the Creed: *I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; ... In this Christian Church He daily and richly forgives me and all believers all our sins.* What a relief to know that God's choosing, calling and enlightening is not based on our works or attitudes, but solely by His grace for us in His Son.

Recognize how blessed you are as God's chosen child, who in this life have been called and enlightened by the truth of His Word, so that you might have eternal life right here and now. Do not take what your Lord has done for you lightly. Was not Judas called? Did Judas not hear the enlightening Word of Christ, which alone has power to save? With all of his advantages so to speak he still ended up being known as the son of perdition.

Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly so that you might be enlightened to the saving truth all your days trusting in it alone. Understand and glory in the truth that God in His grace for you in His Son chose you from eternity, that He has called you to be His own here in time and that the gift of His Spirit has enlightened you to trust in His gracious working from start to finish. He has called you my fellow sinners, so that you too might be forgiven and clothed in His righteousness.

Following Christ Jesus is not an activity for which we can ever boast. Our only boasting is always focused on our Savior God, whose plan of salvation included an eternity's worth of choosing, a perfect sacrifice done here in time of human history, a calling and enlightening that has started in this life for us having come to faith in Jesus and will last forever in perfection. Can anything good come out of Nazareth? If God has so ordered it, goodness can even come out this place among us for Jesus' sake. It has and it does. Amen.