

The Rev. Charlie Holt:

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of Your Word and the call to be a saint of God. And so, we ask that You would give us wisdom and insight into Your Scriptures, illumine our hearts and our minds, and the knowledge and love of Your Son, Jesus. May the preaching of Your Word be His Word for His sake and glory. Amen.

Well, I want to ask you a question, and I want an honest answer.

Do you think of yourself as a saint?

Yes, no, I'm hearing different answers.

Let me see a head shake or head nod. Do you think of yourself as a saint?

Yes, no, I hear different things. Carolyn says yes. You are a saint.

What a delight to have you be a part of our, Ä¶ Well, I think a lot of us, when we think of saints, we don't often put ourselves in that category. We think about the greats like St. Augustine or St. Francis or Carolyn Jones, St. Carolyn. We think of holy people, people that have done great things for God. But when the Scriptures talk about the idea of saints, they're actually talking about you and me.

We are all called to be saints. Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians. He began it this way, first introducing himself, which is kind of different from the way we write letters in our day. We always sign it at the end of the letter, but Paul began his letter to the Ephesians, announcing who's writing it, Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. And then he says this, and this is where we would put, "Dear Mr. and Mrs. so-and-so." He says, "To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus." If he was writing a letter to our church, he would say, "To the saints who are in Ortega," or "To the saints who are in Jacksonville, in Florida."

He's writing to the people who are members of the church in the location of the city of Ephesus, and he calls them saints. Isn't that interesting?

I love the movie The Lion King.

Who's seen that one? Well, have people seen that movie? It's a great movie. It's a children's movie, but it's fun. It's about this son of a king who ends up dying. That's the sad part of the movie, but the son is called Simba. And Simba, after his grief and the tragedy of everything, he runs off into the woods and hangs out with a couple of near-do-well animals who have a slogan, "Acuna Matata," which means "no worries." And so, he sort of lives this "Acuna Matata" kind of life, "no worries," which a lot of young people tend to do, live that sort of carefree, just living for the moment, following my desires, whatever I want to do. And then all of the sudden, a monkey comes along and bonks him on the head.

And he challenges him. He says, "You don't know who you are.

You are Mufasa's son. You are a king.

You're the king's son.

And you have forgotten that.

You have stopped living into that."

And this is part of the challenge of what I want to get across to you today. For those especially who, when asked if you are a saint, shook your head no.

You are a saint if you've been called by God and commissioned for His purposes and sealed by the Holy Spirit of the living God.

Every single Christian, every member of the church is called to be a saint, one of God's holy ones. And if you forget that and you don't live into that, you will not be the fullness of who God has called you to be. Listen to the way that he put it in verse 11. Paul writes, "In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of Him who accomplishes all things according to His counsel and will."

I think one of the reasons why many of us don't think of ourselves as saints is because we know a lot about ourselves, and we know that when it comes to our qualifications, we probably aren't qualified to be saints.

That when we think about the things that we've done in our life or the things that we're currently doing in our lives, we might say, "Well, I haven't lived a saintly life. I'm not doing saintly things." But what Paul says is actually you don't qualify yourself to be a saint.

God actually comes by the calling of God. You are chosen to be a saint, destined to be a saint. Again, listen to the words he put, "In Christ we have obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of Him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of His will."

Back in the old days of the Bible when Moses was calling the Israelites out of Egypt and they were wandering through the wilderness, one of the big questions that came up in that time was, "Why us, God?"

Why did you choose Israel to be God's chosen people? Out of all the peoples of the world, why us?"

And what the Lord's answer is, is the same answer that He gives to you and me when it comes to our calling and being chosen by God.

He says the reason is not because you're more numerous than all the other tribes. In fact, you're just a little small handful of people. You're a small group.

He says neither is it because you're more mighty or stronger than anybody else. No.

And it isn't because you're better people than anybody else either, actually.

When it comes to think of it, you're a bunch of stiff-necked, stubborn people. It's the way that He put it.

He says the reason why I chose you is because I loved you.

Wow.

In other words, it's not anything that we did to earn our salvation or to come to faith in Jesus Christ. It's not because we were smarter than anybody else or have better credentials or went to better schools or make better decisions or are better people in any way.

He loved us and chose us out of the mystery and purposes and counsels of His will.

And that actually should be a very humbling thing, but also a very secure thing.

I think some people think that the idea that they've been called or chosen is an arrogant thing.

But when you understand that it's not because of me or because I'm smarter or wiser or more honest or a better person, that it's God's volition and God's will, it is very humbling, actually. I remember the two young children that were fighting on the playground and one was teasing the other one because she had been adopted.

And the girl was like, "Your parents adopted you."

And the other girl responded, standing up straight, "Yes, my parents chose me. Your parents got stuck with you."

And that's the idea that we have an identity that comes from outside of ourselves that gives us incredible security to then not just be called but commissioned for the purposes for which we have been called. Listen to the way Paul puts it. We have been destined according to the purpose of Him, verse 12, so that ,Ä this is, he's getting into the reason why he called us ,Ä so that we who were the first to set our hope on Christ might live for the praise of His glory.

Our role, our job, our calling, our purpose in life is to bring glory to God. The Presbyterians actually have it right about that when they ask the question, "What is the chief end of man?"

And the answer from the catechism is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

One of our Anglican fathers, C.S. Lewis, says that those are the same thing actually. When you glorify God, you actually are enjoying Him, and when you enjoy God, you actually bring Him praise and glory. That's one of the reasons why church actually should be enjoyable. It should be something that we delight in, not because of ourselves, but because we get to come and marvel in the glory and in the presence and in the power and majesty of the living God. And as we join with our brothers and sisters who have been called according to the same purpose, we find incredible fulfillment in

joy in the celebration of the Lord. But it's not just to glorify God in churches and in church gatherings, but we are to bring light and the glory of God out into the world so that we become the means by which God calls others to Himself. There was a great controversy that happened during the time of St. Augustine. This is back in the fourth century. It's called the Donatus controversy. And what had happened was people were wrestling over authentic and true Christianity. Nobody has the X-ray machine like they had on the Grinch that stole Christmas that can see whether somebody's heart is three sizes too small. We don't have that kind of insight, even with modern AI technology, we can't figure that out. And so back during that time, one of the tests of authenticity was whether you could bear up under suffering and persecution. And so, there was a very cruel Roman emperor named Diocletian who began to persecute the church. And one of the things that he would do is round up and arrest Christians. They would put them to death, but they would also torture them and make them deny Jesus. And they would also ask them to surrender all of their Christian literature and get rid of all their Christian books. And so, some people don't really enjoy being persecuted. I don't know if anybody here would enjoy that.

But as you might imagine, some people gave in. Some people that were members of the church compromised, and they handed over their books, and they handed over their scriptures, and they made peace with the

emperor and renounced the name of Jesus Christ. And so, after Diocletian guide and the persecution subsided, some of those people wanted to come back to church.

Can you imagine how those who had borne up under the persecution might have felt?

In fact, they came up with a word for those people. In Latin, it's the word that we now say traitor, which means somebody who gives up the things. And they had given up the scriptures and given up the truth, and then they wanted back into the faith. And so, a man named Donatus of Carthage argued that the church should not accept them back, that the church needs to be pure and holy, and that sacraments that were done by any of those Christian leaders that then abandoned the faith under the persecution. All of their sacramental acts are now invalid. So, if you were baptized by one of those priests that renounced the faith, then you had to get rebaptized.

And so, they emphasized under Donatus the purity of the church. Now, Saint Augustine, who was the view that prevailed thankfully, said, "Well, that's not really the way the church is made up of people that are always a mix of holiness and sin." And so, every single one of us has moments in our life when we falter and we fail where we give in and we fall prey to the evil one and we sin. And so the way that Jesus, this is Augustine, the way he argued, the way that Jesus described the church as a gathering up of wheat and tares together, and that while the church is still operating in this world, and it's not yet gone to be with the Lord and like the bride that comes down out of heaven, like the Revelation reading we read, but is still in the world, that church is a mixed bag. And there will be some people who are faithful and some people who aren't, and at any given time some people will be faithful, and they won't be even in their own life.

And so, he says the validity of the sacraments doesn't depend on the worthiness or the unworthiness of the minister, and it goes the same for the members of the church.

Validity of your membership in the life of the church doesn't depend necessarily on the worthiness or your unworthiness, but on Him who calls

and upon His worthiness and His glory and His grace. That's amazing news, good news, and that's the teaching of the Scriptures is that the church is not a refuge for saints, so to speak, but a hospital for sinners.

And in all of us are sinners called to be saints. Augustine would describe the church as having an invisible quality and a visible quality. From an invisible perspective, the Lord's perspective, all of our hearts are known. No secrets are hid, as we say in the prayer collect for purity. He sees everything about us in our lives, and He does have the x-ray machine like the Grinch that stole Christmas. He can see right into your heart, and He sees your life, and He knows the way that you're living your life. But His judgments are perfect, but ultimately, they are based on Jesus' work on the cross and His love, His grace, His forgiveness. Would we want it any other way?

Those who are authentic in their faith are part of the invisible church.

The visible church is the institution, the visible members, and we have wolves in sheep's clothing, and we have people that are heretics and people that are schismatics and some people that do immoral things, and all of these things, all in the visible church. And there is sort of a concentric circle overlap with these two things, and the ultimate goal is that the Lord will one day separate out the wheat and the chaff and separate out the true and the untrue. But in the meantime, Augustine says something like this, "For in the ineffable knowledge of God there are many who seem to be outside who are really inside, and many who seem to be inside who are really outside." It's up for the Lord to sort it out. And finally, we are sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism. The way that Paul puts it, "In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, you were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit." At the 845 service, we baptized a young baby, and one of the things that I did was I took the oil of chrism, and I marked her forehead. Her name was Ella Russell. I said, "Ella Russell, you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ's own forever." And that actually is where we get our word chrism from which we get Christ and Christian, that every single one of us are anointed with the outward visible sign of the inward and spiritual grace of the gift of the Holy Spirit, which Paul describes as a deposit and a down payment of our inheritance. And at 845, we did the outward and visible sign on baby Ella, and

God, His calling is upon her life as the inward and spiritual grace and the change of her heart and her life and the calling of a new saint was made today. Isn't that a neat thing? A new saint right here in the midst of our congregation.

But that's our calling, is to make the invisible visible and to allow the deposit of that gift of the Holy Spirit, which we were sealed as saints of God, to become manifest so that His glory, His light will shine through our lives as authentic believers. And the visible church, to the degree that it can, is reflective of the invisible church, and that is the calling of the saints of God.