

Father Robert Malm
Founders' Day Sunday
October 1, 2017

“Gracious God, you call your people”

God is constantly inviting us, calling us, into a deeper relationship, a mystical union, fellowship, with a love at the center of creation; a gift of grace that gives meaning to human life. In the Bible, it begins when God creates human beings – male and female – in the image and likeness of God. We know this call, this invitation, to Adam and Eve, who disregard the gift of grace and seek their own self-centered desires.

The call comes to the chosen people, Israel, beginning with Abraham and continuing all the way to Jesus. Jesus issues the call to his disciples, to the Jews, to all, especially to those beyond conventional respectability. The Church is born to carry forth God's call. With our God-given gift of freedom, each one of us, each human being, responds differently to the call.

Every year, on a Sunday close to September 27th, we celebrate our “Founders' Day,” the anniversary of our church's founding in 1855. This is more than a birthday, more than an anniversary. It is a celebration of the call to those, living more than 162 years ago in this city, who heard God's invitation to start a new Episcopal church, Grace Church.

Today we celebrate the beginning, but we also celebrate those who answered God's call, Christ's call, the call of the Apostles and Prophets through the ages, each and every year – even now in this year, 2017. Today is a celebration of the past, the present, the future – it is a celebration of God's call through the ages.

The first letter of Peter was written to a group of churches in Asia Minor in the early second century, probably 75-80 years after Jesus' resurrection. These Christians were baptizing adults and children converted to the faith. And they were also facing extreme persecution. The first letter of Peter was written to encourage them to continue to answer God's call.

For those living two thousand years ago, and for us today, the author gives four specific encouragements.

1. Put away, strip off, rid yourself of worldly passions and wickedness – including malice, guile, hypocrisy, insincerity, envy, slander, gossip, negativity, anger, pride of the world and the culture surrounding you.
2. Desire, long for, yearn for a Christ-centered spirituality that will refresh your soul, and lead you to health and wholeness.
3. Come to Jesus, grow in your relationship with Christ's living spirit. Encounter, accept, treasure Christ's gifts of grace, of hope, of faith, of peace.
4. Be built, be knit into the fabric of Christian community. One cannot answer the call alone. We are chosen, invited, called to be part of community, to share our lives with others.

This community is called the “priesthood of all believers.” Even those Christians who are part of a community that sets aside ordained priests, even they celebrate the ministry of all baptized. Our baptismal promises unite us to Christ, the one and only “High Priest.” Every baptized Christian is called to share in the priesthood of Christ, and do the priestly work of Christ.

This work of the baptized includes:

1. Offering an ongoing sacrifice of love, to the God who is love;
2. Helping others to come to, and grow into, a relationship with God; and
3. Witnessing to the power of God’s love in all the world.

Today, we celebrate this priesthood of all believers at Grace Church – past, present and future. Today, we proclaim that we are the “stones” built into and upon the cornerstone who is Jesus Christ. And as we rest on the stones who came before us in this place, so our work is to continue to build, so others will know their call to build -- in the years, decades and centuries ahead.

1 Peter 2:1-5, 9-10
Matthew 16:13-20

“Gracious God, you call your people” is the hymn commissioned by Grace Church for its Sesquicentennial (150th) Anniversary Celebration in 2005. The text was written by Carl P. Dow, Jr. It is set to the tune called “Rustington.”