

The

Call



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The Call

It all begins with God! You and I are called to be part of something bigger than ourselves; way more expansive than our dreams with a long lasting impact. There is much chatter about making my mark in this world or leaving my legacy, which is all good. On my own, I can only do what I can do! But in a community of faith (the church), what we can accomplish in this world is all about multiplication...together, we can have an enormous impact.

Belonging creates fulfillment and purpose.

Steve was 68 years old when he found the place where he belonged, a local Christian community. This discovery was a journey which took time. Steve and his wife Mary had worked for years at multiple jobs to provide everything they could for their kids and grandkids. Family was their ultimate value. Families are very important yet Steve had an unfulfilled hunger that cropped up after retirement. When Steve found Grace Lutheran Church and was baptized, he said recently: "I have never felt so loved and fulfilled in my life!" *Belonging matters!*

God works through people. It is through people like you and me that good stuff gets done on earth. When a church community works in its neighborhood, its neighbors are blessed and seeds of God's Kingdom are planted. Like most things of beauty, God's work takes time, patience, persistence and effort.

It's all about relationships. Scott was 50 years old when he asked to talk to me following his dad's funeral. Like a splash of cold water on your face first thing in the morning, the death of Scott's dad was a wake-up call. The conversations that followed as we talked about life, death, purpose, God, etc. were a continuation of experiences and questions that had happened at critical points in his life. It was this death that was the big domino that launched Scott in his quest to become a follower of Jesus. *Relationships matter!* For Scott, losing his dad opened his heart and mind to something more. Scott was baptized at Grace Lutheran Church because he wanted to pursue a life of following Jesus.

So what about belief or faith? Neither Steve nor Scott were "schooled" in doctrine or grasped the whole biblical story before they began this journey. At a subtle level they both had previous experiences in life that had opened them up for this moment where they found value in *belonging* to a faith community. They began acting, living and *becoming a followers of Jesus*. This is often a gradual process of discovery and impactful change. It is here in the potter's hand, as this new life begins to emerge, that faith is formed and belief is shaped as the Jesus way of life comes into focus.

It all begins with God... even though neither Steve nor Scott recognized it as God at the time! For Steve, it was all the love and care he received from the church when he sought something more in his life. Scott desperately wanted something new in his life and this was that decisive push to begin that journey.

Doubt and belief are two shades of the same color! Let's dare to be honest: life throws many questions our way. Faith is not ignorant nor does it require us to give up our mind. It is not either/or: either you believe it or not. Life's questions and doubts do not demonstrate an absence of faith. Rather, like the Old Testament story a man named Jacob who wrestled in the middle of the night, we all wrestle at times with faith and "why" questions. Think of these questions and doubts as the weight room of faith. You may not notice yourself getting stronger immediately, but over time our faith grows because we dare to wrestle with them.

Looking Back on Forming Faith: Believe, Behave, Belong

Since the days of the Reformation 500 years ago, the Christian faith was taught by a process called Confirmation which emphasized faith development. Luther's *Small Catechism* of 1529 was written as a family resource to teach what we believe. The understanding was that if young people would understand what we believe, they would begin to apply these teachings and behave in a Christian way. After completing the instruction, the faith of the young adults would be confirmed and they would belong as adult members of the church. This same process is followed today by Episcopal, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Presbyterian and Methodist congregations.

The *Small Catechism* was primarily an instructional tool to teach the faith. It included a teaching on the Lord's Prayer and both table and morning and evening prayers for the families to pray. The Catechism gave instruction for the families to begin each day by making the sign of the cross to remind themselves that they were claimed by God at their baptism, recite the Apostle's Creed, the Lord's Prayer and then pray the Morning Prayer. The same instructions preceded the Evening Prayer. Luther used the Catechism to teach Christian practice and behavior.

Prior to the publication of the *Small Catechism* in German, the Catholic Mass and the Bible verses that were read during worship were all in Latin. In fact, the only copy of the Bible in any given city was located in the church and read by the priest. Luther completed translating the New Testament into German in nine months and it was published in 1522. With the advent of the printing press people could now purchase a copy of the German New Testament and understand God's Word in their own language!

Luther wrote hymns in German and used popular tunes to teach the faith and practice in 1524. Three examples of Luther's hymns that are found in the *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* includes: a hymn based on the Apostle's Creed: #411, *We All Believe in One True God*; a hymn expressing a commitment to God's Word and spreading the message: #509, *God's Word Is Our Great Heritage*; and a hymn teaching the Lord's Prayer: #746-747: *Our Father, God in Heaven Above*.

At the request of other priests serving congregations who were part of this new Reformation movement, Luther produced and published a German Mass for Christmas 1525. What is evident is that faith and its practice made accessible in the language of the people was one of the major contributions Luther developed so the people of the church could know what they believe about God and practice it in their daily life. Belonging to the church was part of the culture through baptism. To believe, behave and belong was the operative process of faith.

Revisiting Our Lutheran Roots

Martin Luther was born in Germany on November 10, 1483 during a hinge time as the Renaissance, emerging out of Florence, Italy, began pulling European society out of the darkness of the late Middle Ages into the light of a new day. The Roman Catholic Church was the dominant force in power and influence in the lives of most Europeans. Luther's father, a copper miner, invested in his son's education and with his educational success expected his son to become a lawyer who in turn could financially provide for his family. Luther entered law school in May 1505.

Martin Luther was spurred on by his quest for salvation. As a young man, Luther viewed God as a righteous judge and himself as ensnared by sin. A thunderstorm in July 1505 frightened Luther who vowed to become a monk and opened the door for him to pursue salvation deeply, despite his father's angry disapproval. All of his attempts to restrain his sinfulness by religious rigor and frequent confession of sin drove Luther to deeper despair. His vicar, Johannes von Staupitz, at the Augustinian Black Monastery in Erfurt, Germany, encouraged Luther to study to earn a doctoral degree (1512), preach and take the chair of Bible at the newly formed University of Wittenberg.

Luther began his teaching at Wittenberg lecturing on the Psalms in 1513, Romans in 1515 and Galatians in 1516. It was in his study on Romans 1:17, "For in it (the gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, 'The one who is righteous will live by faith,'" that Luther experienced a new birth through faith in Christ. He later reflected on his experience:

"I had indeed been captivated with an extraordinary ardor for understanding Paul in the Epistle to the Romans. But up till then it was not the cold blood about the heart, but a single word in Chapter 1, 'In it the righteousness of God is revealed,' that had stood in my way. For I hated that word 'righteousness of God,' which according to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically

regarding the formal or active righteousness, as they called it, with which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner.

Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God, and said, 'As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteousness and wrath!' Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience. Nevertheless, I beat importunately upon Paul at that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted.

At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, "In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.'" There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.' Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me," (Luther's Works, Vol. 34, pp. 336-337).

Luther encountered the power of justification by grace through faith in Christ in his evangelical discovery (some scholars date this discovery in mid-1518). Luther's quest for peace with God resulted in a gradual development of his theology (faith in God) resulting from his lectures, sermons and other writings focused on the Scripture. His theology evolved as he studied the Scriptures and reacted to the sale of indulgences. In response to the reaction of the Church to his 95 Theses, posted on

October 31, 1517, Luther wrote an *Explanation of the Ninety-Five Theses* in early 1518, and said: "*The church needs a reformation which is not the work of one man, namely, the pope...but it is the work of the whole world, indeed it is the work of God alone,*" (*Luther's Works, Vol. 31, p. 250*). Luther and his teachings were formally banned by Emperor Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire under the guidance of the Roman Catholic Church in May 1521.

The church constantly needs reformation which happens as it participates in the work of God. We live in a new hinge period as our society moves from a modern era to post-modernity. In fact, the idea of some major events that impact the world and faith in 500 year cycles has been pointed out by Phyllis Tickle in her book *THE Great EMERGENCE: 1000 B.C. King David and establishment of the Jewish monarchy; 500 B.C. destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the exile; 4 B.C. birth of Jesus – A.D. 70 the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem and the outmigration of Christians throughout the Roman Empire which spread the faith and planted new churches; A.D. 500 the Roman Empire was dead and Gregory the Great led a church to be the reforming glue that stabilized society amid the political upheaval; and in A.D. 1054, the church East and West parted ways: the Roman Catholic West and the Eastern Orthodoxy.*

As we crawl ashore and find ourselves in a post-modern world, we are seeing much of what "worked" for the church in modernity is slowly dying: less baptized children make it to Sunday School; even less make it to Confirmation; and it no longer is true that once Confirmed they will return when they get married and have children. Less people worship weekly or even monthly. As our society becomes more secular, more people have no clue who Jesus is and it is becoming very clear the old 500 year system begun in the Reformation is dying.

Reversing the Process: Belong, Behave & Believe.

While our society expressed skepticism about "organized religion" and does its own secular thing, there is a hunger for "spirituality," an experience of something greater than ourselves. In response to this new spiritual market, programs and

resources have emerged to sell spiritual positivity; processes to discover your soulful selfhood; the return of Eastern meditation; and much more. The question is: where is the church in this moment of interest? How is the Holy Spirit directing and leading us as we gain our footing in this new landscape?

The same Holy Spirit that led the Jewish persecutor of the early church to become God's greatest evangelist, the Apostle Paul, wants to lead us as well! The Spirit opened Paul's eyes to look beyond everything he knew and loved as a Jew to discover that God wanted to use him to be an evangelist to the Gentiles. That was a radical shift of thought and understanding for Paul and could only happen by the power of God. Paul wrote: *I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some*, (1 Corinthians 9:22c). God is able to do what God wants us to do, if we are willing!

The same Holy Spirit led the Roman Catholic monk and priest, Martin Luther to risk his life for the merciful and gracious God he discovered in the Scriptures. Like the Apostle Paul, Luther could not keep this truth, this relationship with his Lord to himself. Bit by bit and piece by piece, the Reformation of the church was ignited. Again, God is able if we are willing to do great things in and through our lives as the church in this community.

The same Holy Spirit is leading you, me and a church called Grace to participate in God's mission in this community! 2014 is behind us. It provided new learnings and much good has come out of a very painful situation. At the lowest point of my ministry in early May 2014, I picked up a book off my shelf that I had not read which gradually helped me get back on my feet: *CHRISTIANITY AFTER RELIGION: The End of the Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening*, by Diana Butler Bass, 2012. Butler Bass confirms what I have been experiencing at Grace for the past eight years: that no matter how hard I work, what used to work in the 1980's and 90's is simply no longer effective.

In fact, Butler Bass helped me to see the need to reverse the order in which people experience and enter a relationship with God and the church: Belong, Behave and Believe. *Other than joining a political party, it is hard to think of any other sort of community that people join by agreeing to a set of principles... Does anyone go to a knitting group and ask if the knitters believe in knitting or what they hold to be true about knitting? Do people ask for a knitting doctrinal statement? Indeed, if you start knitting by reading a book about knitting or a history of knitting or a theory of knitting, you will very likely never knit... In knitting, the process is exactly the reverse of that in church: belonging to a knitting group leads to behaving as a knitter, which leads to believing things about knitting. Relationships lead to craft, which leads to experiential belief. That is the path to becoming and being someone different. The path of transformation,* (p. 203).

The Call is an opportunity for you and Grace Lutheran Church to give attention to God's Word and listen to the call of God. When Jesus began his ministry immediately after his baptism and 40 day prayer retreat, Jesus walked along the Sea of Galilee and began commanding certain people to drop what they were doing and begin to follow him as a teacher of the way to know and experience God. When Jesus calls us, he expects us to respond. **The Call** is about the journey of following the Lord, not so much about the destination. **The Call** involves our life time and is more of long hike up and down a hilly terrain than a sprint on a flat track. It is about a way of life that is guided and directed by Scriptures and the Holy Spirit.

Each week, one of the Roman provinces will be highlighted as the letter of 1 Peter was addressed to these five areas in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). As the key area of much early church evangelism and ministry, I hope you will find a few facts about these provinces interesting.

The Spread of Judaism and Christianity

Since 1000 B.C., Jews traveled and relocated for the sake of commerce during the reigns of King David and King Solomon. The large relocations of Jews (the Dispersion) happened during

the invasion and conquering of Israel (the Northern Kingdom) by Assyria in 722 B.C. and Judea (the Southern Kingdom) by Babylon in 587 B.C. The end result of this resettlement of the Jews in distant lands is that when they were freed to return to their home land (as told in the Hebrew Scriptures of Ezra and Nehemiah), many chose to remain in their new land.

By the time of the spread of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire and beyond, Jewish Synagogues were scattered across the Empire. Millions of Jews lived outside of Judea by the time of Jesus. Viewed as the long awaited Messiah by Jesus twelve disciples and the early evangelists like Paul, Barnabas and Silas, it was only natural that preaching and witnessing about Jesus was often begun in Jewish synagogues as they traveled from city to city.

The tradition of John the Apostle was strong in Asia Minor (the *near-east*, part of modern Turkey, the western part was called the Roman province of Asia). The authorship of the Johannine works traditionally and plausibly occurred in Ephesus, *c.* 90-110. According to the New Testament, the Apostle Paul was from Tarsus (in south-central Anatolia) and his missionary journeys were primarily in Asia Minor.

Christianity has a long history in Asia Minor, which is the birthplace of numerous Christian Apostles and Saints, such as Paul of Tarsus, Timothy, Nicholas of Myra (Saint Nicholas), Polycarp of Smyrna and many others.

Two out of the five most important cities of early Christianity are in Asia Minor: Constantinople (Istanbul) and Antioch (Antakya). Antioch was also the place where the followers of Jesus were called *Christians* for the first time (Acts 11:26).

All of the first seven Ecumenical Councils were held in Asia Minor. Of these, the Nicene Creed, declared with the First Council of Nicaea (İznik) in 325, is of utmost importance and has provided the essential definitions of present-day Christianity.

Today, however, Turkey has a smaller Christian percentage of its population than any of its neighbors including Syria, Iraq and even Iran, due to the genocide during and after WWI, and the subsequent large scale population transfers of Turkey's Christian population, most notably Greece, and the forced exodus of indigenous Armenians, Assyrians, Greeks and Georgians upon the breakup of the Ottoman Empire. This was followed by the continued emigration of most of the remaining indigenous Christians over the next century.

During the tumultuous period of the First World War and founding of the Turkish Republic, up to 3 million indigenous Christians are alleged to have been killed. Prior to this time, the Christian population stood at around 20% of the total. There is an estimated 349 active churches in all of Turkey.

January 18-24, 2015

Pontus

Pontus was a large land mass located south of the Black Sea at times including almost 40% of the central to Eastern shore. Throughout its earliest history, it was under the control of the Hittite Empires and the Persian dynasty. King Mithridates established the Kingdom of Pontus ca. 302 B.C, and the dynasty held until it fell to Roman rule in 64 B.C. Pontus was combined with Bithynia into a new Roman Province. Because of the rural nature of much of this province, there was minimal Greek and Roman influence across much of the province, except for coastal cities like the Greek colony of Sinope, a port city on the Black Sea. During the time of Jesus, Philo of Alexandria tells that there were many Jews living in Pontus.

On the Day of Pentecost, the birth of the Church, there were Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 2:9). Because of the mountainous topography of Pontus, it is likely that these Jews would have sailed from a port city on the Black Sea like Sinope and sailed west to the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas to arrive in Palestine. Despite any biblical evidence of the Apostle Paul's missionary activity in Pontus, missionary activity in Pontus

happened attested to by Paul's partner is Gospel Aquila. He was a native of Pontus, who Paul met in Corinth, Greece and later left to serve with his wife Priscilla in Ephesus, a city in the Roman Province of Asia located in Western Asia Minor (Acts 18:2, 18-21).

1. *1.1-2 Chosen & Destined*

You have been chosen by God and this call requires your response. We either choose to follow Jesus with our life or do our own thing. The great thing is that we really cannot do it alone. Jesus is with us and his Holy Spirit (God's active presence at work within his followers) gives us power beyond our own. Secondly, Jesus formed a community of followers for support, mutual encouragement and accountability.

We have been chosen to be on God's team! Lest we get a big head, it is God's desire that all people know they are chosen to be part of God's community on earth. How did you learn about the story of God's love in Jesus? A parent, neighbor, spouse, pastor, Sunday School teacher? The point is that none of us discover the Jesus story alone. You and I have been destined to share this story with other people so they can hear the call of God as well! That is our privilege and responsibility. Who has discovered the love of Jesus through you? Who are you praying for right now to have an open heart and mind to find the love of Jesus?

2. *1.3-5: New Birth, Living Hope, & Inheritance*

This letter may have been written as encouragement to the newly baptized Christians. With the wide audience of much of Asia Minor (the current country of Turkey), this letter would be circulated among many Christian congregations meeting as house churches with some larger cities having multiple house churches (only so many people could meet in these homes). Baptism was seen as the birthing action of God who mercifully gives the new beginning, the new life which fills us with new hope!

Like Romans 6:1-11, our new birth is a direct result of the death and resurrection of Jesus. He has given us an inheritance that will never die (imperishable), fresh and pure like a new blanket of snow (undefiled) and ever-brilliant and dazzling (unfading). Whew! Better than any Brink's truck, your inheritance is kept in heaven and protected by God! Write a prayer of thanksgiving to God as you think about this amazing gift God has given you.

3. *1.6-9: Tested*

This reading can be a little tricky. Gold is tested by fire to purify it and is perishable. Meanwhile, our faith which is more precious than gold may find its character tested resulting in our praise of the Lord at the final judgment. It takes faith to trust what you cannot see. Husbands and wives trust each other when they are apart from each other at work or traveling that each is faithful in thoughts, words and actions. Whether you are trusting God or a spouse, it is relational faith.

We begin to experience the love and joy of our eternal relationship with the Lord now. While our earthbound experience is limited to faith, someday we will know the limitless nature of God. It's all about relationships. What comes to mind for you today as you think about these verses?

4. *1.10-12: Good News for You*

Long ago the Hebrew prophets foretold of the coming of Jesus, his suffering and his glory. Many of these prophets were misunderstood and suffered for the messages they delivered. They would have loved to see their words become reality. It was not until the right time that this message of grace took on flesh and entered this world.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, the message of Jesus has taken root in the hearts and minds of many Christ followers in Asia Minor. You just have to love the phrase *things into*

which the angels long to look, (v. 12)! Despite the suffering of the message-bearers and the new followers in the Second Generation church, the power of the Jesus story was gaining momentum. The risk of suffering and death only served to advance the movement. Jot down your reflections.

5. 1.13-16: A Call to Live Holy

God calls you and me to live our lives with our hope fully set on Jesus and the grace and favor he gives to us. What does it mean to live a Christian life in the United States in a times when secularity is flexing its muscle and gaining momentum even among active Christians? Our secular society is subtly increasing its influence in our lives by wooing us to think that all we own and all we earn is a result of our own work. I am not suggesting that our effort does not impact our wealth or success. However, life, health, even the fact that we were born when and where and to whom we were born is no random accident. All of life: our person, our family, our resources, our job and health all come from the Architect of Life, God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Secular society wants to name you and me or our family as the god of our life: everything we do is to please ourselves or our family and not to first or ever honor and worship God.

To live Christian means that we always keep before our minds eye that our hope is found in the favor and grace given freely to us in Jesus, (1:13).

January 25-31, 2015

Galatia

Galatia was the name of a province of the Roman Empire in Asia Minor (modern central Turkey). It was established by the Emperor, Augustus in 25 BC, covering most of formerly independent Celtic Galatia (an Indo-European tribe), with its capital at Ancyra. During the years of Roman Empire its borders changed often and included parts of Phrygia, Pisidia, Lycaonia and Isauria.

In Paul's first missionary journey, he traveled to Antioch, earlier established in Pisidia but now existed in the province of Galatia (Acts 13:14ff). Like Jesus before him, Paul and many of the missionaries began their proclamation in the Jewish synagogue. He also preached the Gospel in Galatian cities of Iconium (Acts 14:1-7), Lystra (Acts 14:8-19) and Derbe (Acts 14:20-21). Paul also wrote a letter to the churches of Galatia, a book in the New Testament.

6. 1.17-21: *Behave reverently*

We are urged as Jesus' followers to be mindful of the One who rescues us from insane and self-centered living. The temptation is real to become mired in our culture for people who have been Christians for a long time. Our society is effected by a short attention span, boredom and losing interest at the drop of a hat. Television has its role in these attention-based changes which impact on how teachers teach, how marketers advertise products and even how the church gets its message out there.

The most effective witness of the church is the behavior of individual Christians in the world. God is watching how you and I live! In what way does that matter to you? Our reading for today calls us to live our lives in *reverent fear* (v. 18) or awe-some awareness that the precious Lamb of God (Jesus) is present with you always. Call upon him in prayer throughout your day; ask for guidance; give him your concerns and problems.

A second and equally important reality is that you are the mirror of God to those who do not know nor follow the Lord. Your words and actions reflect who you are in Jesus Christ to others. As the memory of the story of Jesus slips in our society, our behavior as a witness becomes even more important. How can you be more intentional of your opportunities to point others to Jesus and his worshipping community?

It should be noted in this section that we have been set free from our "futile ways inherited from our ancestors" (v. 18). These verses include a rich section on how Jesus has rescued us by his shed blood and has been raised from the dead. Take note of the preexistence of Jesus since before world began (v. 20). Each verse builds on the next pointing us to "trust God" (v. 20). How we behave or live and what we believe should be knit together in the unity of our heart and mind.

7. 1:22-25: *New Birth in Love*

Admittedly, I naturally repel or resist the word "obedience," due to my inclination to rebellion. I do not write this statement with any sense of pride. Quite to the contrary. My life may have been easier if it were not for my "I will do it my own way" attitude. As I stumble through this series of verses, it is clear that apart from obedience to the truth, the good news of the Gospel (v. 25), we simply will be caught in the web of our old way of living and not experience the fullness of joy that is ours as followers of Jesus.

"You have been born anew" (v. 23) recalls an action that has already happened (pointing back to 1:3), rebirth through the living Word of God vs the perishable world that will eventually pass away. It is these living words of Scripture and inspiration of the Holy Spirit that "endure forever," (v.25). The fruit or result of the message proclaimed and practiced by the Christians of Asia Minor was a mutuality of love expressed within the church.

Is there room for growth in Christian love in your life? How about in our church? What holds us back in any way from growing stronger as a community of faith? What can God do through you to help our church become more Christ like? The command to us is simple: *love one another deeply from the heart* v. 22.

8. *2.1-3: Long for Nourishment*

Have you noticed how new born babies have basically three stages to their existence: eating, sleeping and pooping! Granted, as they grow a little bit, a window of alertness and cooing enters in that makes it all worthwhile! Though a baby cannot tell you in words what they want or need, they do a fine job of letting you know with a cry that they are hungry, tired or need their diaper changed. "Like newborn infants, long for nourishment," (2:2).

Like newborn babies, get rid of your dirty diaper behavior of "malice:" wanting to harm our neighbor; "guile:" to unfairly get the better of our neighbor" as well as hypocrisies (saying one thing and doing another), being envious and speaking evil of others. For most of us, old habits die hard. With God's help, our words and attitudes can change from harmful to helpful and our actions from a curmudgeonly old crank to a courteous and compassionate neighbor.

We create an appetite for God's Word by our consistent effort to read, think and put it's teaching into practice. For anyone who has never really read the Bible, it takes work. Here are a few suggestions to make your Bible reading more successful: It always works best to begin your day in the Word rather than waiting just before bedtime when you are too tired. This may mean waking up twenty minutes earlier so you are not too rushed. Ask the Holy Spirit in prayer to open your heart and mind to grasp and remember throughout the day what you are reading. "Speak to me, Holy Spirit, as I read your Word today." God will honor your prayer and your effort!

9. *2.4-10: Chosen*

There is nothing quite like being elected, selected or chosen! Back in the day when Jody and I were dating, guys still commonly did the asking of girlfriends to be their wife. While this feels like a tradition that is changing in our culture today, it was a greater step back in time in our

recent trip to Tanzania to hear of an even older tradition that lives on among a people group called the Maasai who still practice the tradition of the father of his daughter who arranges the marriage! No matter if it being selected to be part of a team, a new job, winning an award or an election, it is great to be chosen.

In 1 Peter 2:9, reminds us that we have been elected, selected or chosen by God. This promise of being chosen grew out of a promise first given to Abraham and his descendants, the Jews, in Genesis 12:1-3; 1 Chronicles 16:13; Psalm 89:3-4; Isaiah 65:9, etc. Jesus uses the idea of election as well in Mark 13:20, 22, and 27. The call as God's elect began in this study in 1:2 (see also 2 Timothy 2:10). As God's chosen followers, we have been called "in order that (so that we will obediently) proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of the darkness into his marvelous light," (2:9). God's calling to you and me is not just that we may be followers of the Lord but that we would tell others so that they too may find the light of the way of the Lord.

This section is the largest reading referring to stones, living stones in the Bible, building us a community of faith into a "spiritual house," to bring God our worship. When we gather as a church to worship our purpose is to bring our praise, thanks, prayer and be strengthened in our daily lives by the encouragement of God's Word. Today's reading is one of the largest collection of Hebrew Scriptures in a small section: v. 6 = Isaiah 28:16; v. 7b = Psalm 118:22; v. 8a = Isaiah 8:14; vv. 9a, c-d = Isaiah 43:20-21; 9a, b = Exodus 19:6; v 10a-b = Hosea 1:6, 9; 2:3, 25.

We all need God's reminder that we have been chosen to be and live as God's people. Highlight 2:9-10 in your Bible. Write it out on a post-it note and place it on your bathroom mirror to remind you as you start your morning and end your day. Look for opportunities to tell other people of God's promise for them.

10. 2:11-12: Honorable Conduct

What endearing name have you received that when you hear it you know that there is a request that will follow? In the New Testament, every time that "beloved" or beloved of God or my beloved appears, it always has an expectation that follows: *I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul. Conduct ourselves honorable...* 1 Peter 1:11-12a (see also Romans 12:19; 1 John 2:7; 1 Corinthians 10:19; James 1:16).

The Christians in Asia Minor were "aliens and exiles" in this land. They were sojourners and strangers in a foreign place and as a result lacked rights and status in society many of whom lived as non-citizens. Living as an alien was part of the Jewish experience as well (see Genesis 17:8; 23:4; Exodus 6:4 and Acts 7:6). Part of our Christian faith is the promise that our ultimate home is heaven. While citizens of the United States, it sensitizes us to the challenges of our early Christian family and all who live as non-citizens in our country.

We are sojourners in this life with the knowledge that this life is temporary while we hold to a promise of permanence in the presence of our Lord, Jesus Christ. While we live in this life, we have a calling to live by the guidance of the Holy Spirit and not by our selfish human desires. In fact, the major calling upon our life is to live with all honor given to God so that people we know who are distant from God and his church, may see our life as a testament to our faith in God. The outcome of our witness by how we live and treat people is that they too may come to discover God's love revealed in Jesus and find the incredible value of belonging to his community of faith: the church. Who is God using you to be a Christian witness? How is it going? What challenges are you experiencing? Keep praying!

February 1-6, 2015

Cappadocia

Like most of Asia Minor, Cappadocia's history was impacted by the rule of outsiders: The Persian Empire (550-330 B.C.), Alexander the Great's Empire (334-323 B.C.), the Selucid Empire (312-63 B.C.) as well as internal rulers and bands of insurgents arising in various areas of Asia Minor. Finally, the Roman Empire began to exert its military control.

Cappadocia was an inland province of wild and mountainous countryside situated south of the province of Pontus, east of the province of Galatia and north of the Taurus Mountains. This remote province was made accessible first by the Persians who cut the Royal Road across it from Susa (in modern day Iraq) to Sardis on the Western coast of the province of Asia (Western Turkey). Later the Romans cut a road from the Black Sea in Pontus through Cappadocia and down through the Cilician Gates (a natural pass through the Taurus Mountains).

According to Apocryphal book of 1 Maccabees 15:22, there was a sizable Jewish community in Cappadocia as early as the second century B.C. There were Jews from Cappadocia in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost when the Christian church was born (Acts 2:9). Whether it was these new Christians who returned home and began to proclaim the Gospel or other missionaries who planted churches in Cappadocia, we do not know.

In the fourth century three Cappadocian's were influential in the development of Christian theology: Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa and Basil of Caesarea. At this time, the church in Caesarea was significant and it included a system of almshouses, an orphanage, old peoples' homes, and a leprosarium (leprosy hospital).

A volcano erupted and covered a vast area of Cappadocia with volcanic ash. Over time, rivers and wind eroded this volcanic landscape and the *Fairy Chimney* rock formations that remain (they appear somewhat like the rock formation at the Wisconsin Dells) dot the horizon. During the persecution of the church by the Ottoman's about A.D. 1000-1200, Christians dug into the soft volcanic rock and carved out churches underground in which to worship and hide. A number of these gorgeous sanctuaries still exist and are a joy to tourists.

11. 2:13-17: Respect Civil Authority

The readings for this week builds off of the thinking laid down in 1 Peter 2:11-12 about how we conduct ourselves in public. Part of our experience that has emerged out of our history in the United States has resulted in a long-standing value of individualism. While this value has served us well in the past, a new collaborative style of work that values teamwork is emerging. Jesus set forth to build a new community of followers that were knit together by the call of God. A negative impact of individualism has been the idea of "me and Jesus." While personal faith is important, it is no more important than the shared life and faith of the church. We need the love, prayer and support of each other as we serve God in this world.

The Roman Empire was a vast governing night mare spanning many cultures, languages, including a large portion of Europe, Asia Minor, and Palestine, Egypt and across the North shore of Africa. It was a non-Christian government until the conversion of Emperor Constantine in A.D. 312. What is evident in this section is that as Christians, we are to honor and respect civic leaders in authority. On the one hand, this thinking reflects good civic duty even if these Christians are not civilians. On the other hand, as they pray for civic leaders the desire is for peace and good for all (1 Timothy 2:1-4).

Whether we are civic leaders ourselves or members of a community, these verses call us to be mindful of our behavior as part of a community: speak well of our city, work to improve the quality of life for all, and give respect to our leaders and this includes public servants, educational leaders, and the business community. Differing ideas and perspective shared around a collaborative table can only strengthen a city as we work together for common good.

Civil disobedience, strikes and protests are all part of our history and have brought about change in our society, oftentimes for good. Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrestled with texts like these (and the Fifth Commandment to not kill) in Nazi Germany when he decided to support the subversive movement that sought the lesser of two evils of trying to kill Hitler. As you reread 2:17, what does this verse say to you?

12. 2.18-20: Endurance

There are some Scriptures that have been quoted and used to support cultural systems that bring harm to specific groups of people and this is one of them. While systemic racism still exists, let me be clear that other Scriptures affirm that ALL people equally matter to God!

Admittedly taken out of its context, verse 20 can be applied to Christians in work situations or as neighbors that we are to endure difficult situations for the sake of our witness (v. 12). I am not suggesting that you endure abuse at work or in a relationship without seeking justice or speaking truth into an unjust environment. We serve God who values justice! What I am saying based on verses 12 and 20 is to pursue justice keeping in mind that we do so knowing how we handle it is a reflection on our Lord.

What are some challenging situations that you have endured? How did your identity in Jesus impact how you handled this situation? What could you have done differently?

13. 2.21-25: *Follow Jesus' Example*

The quote of Isaiah 53:9 in 1 Peter 2:22 about the suffering servant was popularized a number of years ago with the WWJD (What Would Jesus Do) bracelet campaign so that we would follow in his steps (v. 21d). The idea led people to think about what Jesus would do in a given situation and try and imitate that action. Ironically, Jesus did not call us to imitate but to follow his example (v. 21). Interestingly, *the word for example is used only here in the NT (New Testament), and means literally a pattern of letters of the alphabet by means of which children, by tracing over, learned to write...the verb means not to imitate but to follow Jesus in his willingness to endure suffering...It is a call to discipleship rather than a call to imitation,* (P. Achtemeier, *Hermenia: 1 Peter*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1996, p. 199).

To be a follower of Jesus is costly (see Jesus words on counting the cost of following (see Luke 14:28-30; 31-33). Like many of the over 40 year olds at Grace Lutheran Church, I grew up in a religiously Christian community where going to worship (called going to church) was something most of us did. I learned from my parents what it meant to be a spiritual Christian as we practiced our faith by reading the Bible, a devotional book, and praying together most every evening. We listened to Jesus call to follow: *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me,* (Mark 8:34). The cross lies at the center of the call to be a follower of Jesus.

God rescues all who have ears to listen and desire to follow Jesus from our selfish and sinful ways to a new way of life. Martin Luther referred to this daily process as dying to oneself. The Jesus way runs in contrast to the way of our society. In fact, we have been called as a church to be a contrast community whose lives point to Jesus as our life and hope and by our actions show a better way to live! In what way do these words make sense to you? We all know that our actions often fall short of showing others that we are following Jesus. It is the grace and forgiveness of Jesus that frees us from guilt and gives us confidence by the power of the Holy Spirit to keep on following!

14. 3.1-6: Wives

Women, what would you say if I said: *let's just skip this section?* Just in case you choose to read and discuss it, knowing that it was a fitting word to wives some 2000 years ago. Thankfully, due to women's rights and full access to education things have changed for the good. Two main concepts have been introduced in the section from 2:12-3:6: First, act with honor toward others (2:12). Secondly, willingly endure suffering (2:20) both of which are based on our witness to Jesus who willingly endured suffering for us (2:23-24). As I stated earlier this week, God is a God of justice and God does not want us to unjustly suffer. Yet how we handle unjust situations matters to God as it reflects on our witness.

In our current society, I feel I must restate that abuse in any form is unacceptable: to a child, adult, female or male. If you find yourself in a situation and are uncertain where to turn for support, you can call or text Pastor Dahlseng if you would like: 847-513-2481. The National Domestic Abuse Hotline phone number is: 800-799-SAFE.

What is of value in this section? If your husband is not a follower of Jesus, how you live your life is a witness to him. Pray that he may have an open heart and mind to the work of the Holy Spirit. Secondly, how we dress does communicate a message (and I am not telling anyone how to dress!). While we are not Mennonites and committed to simple living, Hollywood should not dictate what we need to do look attractive in the eyes of God (these are not my fashion tips either)! What do you find of value in this reading?

15. 3.7: Husbands

Out of the fire and into the frying pan! Our lives as followers of Jesus which impact our witness to him, is our calling as husbands. Be considerate and respectful, a Christian shaped by the character of God (see Galatians 5:22-25). Above all, be a man of prayer. Few things in life unite a couple like praying together consistently, not just when there are problems. Practice praying together for the long haul. Few couples fall out of love when the spiritual practice of prayer is consistently a part of the marriage.

I do not know about your marriage, but Jody is certainly not the weaker sex and it would not fly well if I thought that way! She is smart, a better disciplinarian and our kids seek out her advice on way more things than me. Jody is a good and strong leader in her profession and in our family. I am blessed!

What do you find helpful in this solitary verse? If you as a couple do not pray together, what is holding you back? Meal prayers of thanksgiving and praying the Lord's Prayer together could be your start. Here is one of the many prayers you could use from our hymnal at Grace: *Eternal God, without your grace no promise is sure. Strengthen us with your patience, kindness, gentleness, and all other gifts of your Spirit, so that we may fulfill the vows we have*

made. Keep us faithful to each other and to you. Fill us with such love and joy that we may build a home of peace and welcome. Guide us by your word to serve you all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen, (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, Publishers, 2006, p. 82).

February 8-14, 2015

Asia

Like all of the provinces previously mentioned, the Province of Asia located on the Western seaboard of Asia Minor has a long history of outside control: the Persians, Alexander the Great, the Roman Empire. Asia was regarded as the richest of the Roman provinces. Good soil produced many exports through great sea ports. Because of the ease of access to Greece, Asia was heavily influenced by Greek culture and education. It was also very spiritual with a rich tradition of many gods and traditions.

There were also many Jews and therefore synagogues in Asia. Like a number of the already mentioned provinces of Asia Minor, Jews from Asia were present in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:9). Jews from Asia also were present and argued with the first Christian martyr Stephen (Acts 6:9).

The Apostle Paul was forbidden from entering Asia on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:6) yet he sailed from a city in Asia, Troas (Acts 16:11). Paul stopped briefly in Ephesus, the capital of the Roman province (Acts 18:19-21) and stayed over two years during his third journey (Acts 19:1-22; see also Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 15:32; 16:8, 19; 2 Corinthians 1:8). Other important cities includes: Colossae (Colossians 2:1; evangelized by Epaphras 1:7, 12-13), Hierapolis (Colossians 4:13) and Assos (Acts 20:13-14).

The Book of Revelation, believed to be authored by John of Patmos (a Greek island about 30 miles off the coast of Asia Minor), mentions seven churches of Asia (three chief cities first: Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamum and then added Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea (Rev. 1:11).

16. 3:8-12: Church Conduct

This section serves as a conclusion, noted by the word: *Finally*, to the middle body of the letter (2:11-4:11). These 69 verses has reinforced how we as followers of Jesus are to live or behave. The middle section of the letter followed on the heels of the opening body (1:13-2:10) which affirmed God's call upon our lives as Jesus' followers. The opening body was preceded by the greeting and introduction to the churches of Asia Minor (1:1-12) which reminds us of our new birth into the living hope in Jesus.

An important word to the church is to work toward unity of the spirit in love (3:8). Unity in the Spirit does not imply that we swallow our thoughts and feelings and ignore differences of opinion. What matters most is not what I think but what we as a community of faith decide as much as possible by consensus. While we are committed to work toward consensus on things that matter most in God's big picture of life and faith, the aim is to allow all voices to be heard and considered. Even if we have to agree to disagree on some things, the hope is that we can do all things in a spirit of love and respect.

There is enough evil at work in the world that uses the tongue or email to hurt, divide and bring harm. This is the stuff that makes the news. As church, we are encouraged to discontinue repaying evil with evil (v. 9). Instead, as the writer quotes from Psalm 34:12-16, we are instead to extend a word and action of blessing. Under our own power we will always come up short in blessing each other but by the Holy Spirit, we can forgive and move forward following the Lord's leading. What thoughts are coming to your mind that you want to surrender to the Lord?

17. 3:13-17: *Suffering for Christian Behavior*

Roman Emperors faced many challenges in extending and maintaining the Empire's borders, adequate roads and safe passage, governance across a wide spectrum of languages and cultures and an economy to insure peace and taxation to keep it all running. Keeping potential threats at bay even among its military heroes was crucial to the rulers. Emperor Nero (A.D. 54-59) was infamous for his persecution of Christians mostly in the vicinity of Rome. It is thought that 1 Peter was written during the latter years of the reign of Emperor Domitian (A.D. 81-96) about whom many second century Christian and non-Christians wrote about the suffering he inflicted.

Paul Achtemeier writes: *there is ample evidence that Christians did in fact fall victim to Domitian's lethal wrath. This included many of the nobility, even some within Domitian's own household, who at this time were apparently turning in increasing numbers to Christianity,* (ibid. p. 31). It is to this situation that 1 Peter speaks an encouraging word about suffering for what is right, always with Christ as Lord in their hearts (vv. 14-15). The writer describes courageous and tenacious faith that maintains a gentle and reverent spirit. At the core of this letter is the reminder to be ready to defend your hope in Jesus (vv. 15-16).

Domitian's power was exerted to the farthest extent of his Empire. He sought to insure subordination to his rule by insisting on being addressed as a divinity. This demand was met by repugnance by Christians. Hence, persecution of Christians in the stronghold of the church, Asia Minor, would likely have been the fiercest. This letter was sent to reinforce resistant yet Christian behavior. Record your thoughts and prayer.

18. 3:18-22: The Suffering and Risen Christ

We do not suffer alone. This section quickly follows the difficult section we just read to move the focus of our attention off of ourselves and back to our Lord Jesus who suffered, died and is risen. Jesus, our Lord, died for the sake of our sin and the sin of all people (v. 18). He has saved us when we participated in his death and resurrection at our baptism (v. 21). The letter asserts an ancient Christian teaching that while Jesus was dead in his body and prior to his resurrection, he was alive in the spirit and went to announce good news to the disobedient during the flood in the days of Noah (vv. 18-20). Frankly, these are very difficult verses to interpret.

In Genesis 6:3 it speaks of God's patience in judgment and a placement limiting the length of human life because of the deep sorrow God felt in relationship to human evil (Genesis 6:5-6). The story continues with God's amazing grace in sparing the lives of Noah and his family through the waters of flood. It is this dual word of the patience of God in judgment and the promised saving waters of Christian baptism empowered by the resurrection of Jesus that encouraged Christians of Asia Minor who may have wondered why the Lord lingered in returning or ending this lengthy persecution suffered by his church. In baptism into Christ, these believers had died to this evil world with all its evil ways and reborn into the new Christian community in which they belong.

While the church struggles to find its footing in a growing secular society in the Western world, many Christians still suffer greatly for their faith in other parts of our world. What links this reading with the rest of the letter of 1 Peter is the reminder that we belong to Christ and his body the church and we are to remain vigilant in our witness as we live out our lives among people distant from the Lord and his church. Express your gratitude for God's call upon your life. How will you live for our Lord today?

19. 4.1-6: Practice Love while Suffering

This section picks up an earlier theme of contrast from the Prophet Hosea 1:10: *Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people* (1 Peter 2:10). The Gentiles referred to are non-Christians of the community with whom many of the Gentile converts to followers of Jesus and belong to churches scattered throughout Asia Minor used to engage in wild party living (4:3-4). In addition to the persecutions suffered by these Christians from the Empire, their former party friends are adding local trouble by spreading lies about the church (*blaspheme*, v. 4). Today's reading serves to urge the church to pursue the new Christian behavior as they have partied enough in their former life.

While there are a variety of interpretations about the *dead* (v. 6) some who want to link it back to 3:19, it makes greater sense to understand it as referring to their contemporaries who are spiritually dead because they rejected the message of the gospel proclaimed to them (see John 5:25; Romans 6:11; Ephesians 2:1, 5; Colossians 2:13; 1 Timothy 5:6; James 2:26). It is our role to plant the seed of faith by proclaiming our hope in Jesus yet it only the Holy Spirit who sprouts the growth in faith (1 Corinthians 3:7) to all who respond to the Gospel's call with ears to hear (Mark 4:9). We proclaim but God inspires the response and alone, in the end, is the judge of that response (1 Peter 4:6).

Have you noticed some of the verses that inspired our creeds: *for our sake he suffered death* (3:18), *is raised* (3:21) and *ascended into heaven and is at the right hand of God* (3:22)? In today reading, *he will judge the living and dead* (4:5). The purpose of the creeds are to give us a summary of our faith so we can more easily give a testimony in whom we believe. We speak the creed in worship to help us put our faith in God to memory. It also gives a public witness to anyone in worship who may be curious about God and in whom Christian believe.

While our corporate worship of God is an encouragement to our personal faith and practice, we all choose to respond to the call of God in our own lives. To this end our reading says, *because Christ suffered in the flesh for you, have the same intention to live the rest of your earthly life no longer by human desires but by the will of God* (4:1-2). We talk often about leaving our legacy for our family and community. This speaks of the question of how we want to be remembered or how we intend to live out the rest of our life. Are you intending to live following the will of God?

There is a late 19th century gospel song written by Judson Van DeVenter that gives voice to the call of our Lord to follow him with the rest of our life. I invite you to ponder, pray and perhaps even sing these words:

All to Jesus I surrender; All to Him I freely give; I will ever love and trust Him, In His presence daily live.

(Refrain): I surrender all, I surrender all; All to Thee, my blessed Savior, I surrender all.

All to Jesus I surrender; Humbly at His feet I bow, Worldly pleasures all forsaken; Take me, Jesus, Take me now.

(Refrain)

All to Jesus I surrender; Make me, Savior wholly Thine; Let me feel the Holy Spirit, Truly know that Thou art mine.

(Refrain)

All to Jesus, I surrender; Lord, I give myself to Thee; Fill me with Thy love and power; Let Thy blessings fall on me.

(Refrain)

20. 4:7-11: Live Christian Together

This reading represents the final verses of the main body of 1 Peter (2:11-4:11) and describes characteristics of a healthy church. While the earlier writing narrates how Christians are to behave in the public and in the face of hostility from non-Christians, these verses explain how they are to live and work together as church. These words serve as a guide that point us toward a solid foundation as a faith community. Listen closely, prayerfully ponder them and let us pursue the character they describe.

Jesus said that we do not know the day nor the hour when he will return but be ready (Luke 12:35-40), live for today and seize every opportunity to make the Jesus way of life known. Live your faith and call upon the Lord's guidance and assistance in prayer (v. 7). Practice mutual hospitality with each other (Romans 12:13); we are called to demonstrate love toward each other (John 15:12; Romans 12:9; 1 Corinthians 13:13); discover the share your spiritual gifts to build up the church (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, 11); and the importance of ministering or serving (1 Corinthians 16:15; 2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:1).

Let me repeat, our ultimate purpose in life is to worship, serve and give witness to our Lord, Jesus Christ. We are called to do this as good neighbors, in our vocations or jobs, and with our family. You and I need each other as the church for encouragement, strength and as a constant source of prayer. We belong together in this community of faith, we prompt each other to behave and live as followers of Jesus and inspire one another in our faith. This is what church looks like and how it acts toward each other. As we fall short of that picture in 4:7-11, we continue to grab hold of the grace and forgiveness of our Lord. Amen.

February 15-17, 2015

Bithynia

Bithynians were an immigrant Thracian tribe (Thrace was a kingdom located in present day Bulgaria). They fell under the dominion of Persia (546 BC), and were included as part of Phrygia, which comprised all the countries up to the Hellespont and Bosphorus, near the Black Sea.

Bithynia was given as a gift by its last king to the Roman republic (74 B.C.). As a Roman province in Northwest Asia Minor, the boundaries of Bithynia frequently varied, and it was commonly united for administrative purposes with the province of Pontus.

While the Apostle Paul was forbidden by the Spirit of Jesus from entering Bithynia (Acts 16:4), a commissioner of province (Pliny the Younger) wrote to Emperor Trajan in ca. A.D. 111-113, that the number of Christians was very great to the point that even rural areas and small villages were populated with Christians.

The most important cities were Nicomedia, Nicaea for which the Nicene Creed was named having hosted the First Ecumenical Council in A.D. 325 and Chalcedon, located at the mouth of the Bosphorus, and host to the Fourth Ecumenical Council in A.D. 451 which approved the doctrine about the two natures of Christ: that Jesus was both fully human and fully divine.

21. 4.12-19: *Suffering for Being Christian*

In our society, Christians and non-Christians alike experience suffering in daily life due to a variety of issues including: broken relationships, addictions, the death of loved ones, poor health, mental and emotional illness, poverty, unemployment and under-employment, inadequate housing and homelessness, etc. While few Christians suffer because of their belief, we may experience some rebuff from people who are antagonist against the church. Let us not lose heart but persist in living and loving as Christians as we consider again the great cost bore by our Lord and many in the history of our faith.

The churches of Asia Minor knew painful suffering for being followers of Jesus (vv. 4:12-14, 16). This section served as a reminder that they may know the joy of the Lord even as they were under fire. While they faced this test because of their Christian behavior, they were to avoid suffering because of illegal behavior (v.15).

The section concludes with a reminder of the impending judgment of God (vv. 17-18). It is interesting to note that some of the most gracious, thoughtful and Christ-like people I have met in life include Christians who suffer with long-term illness, have worked through the loss of a loved one or many people I met in Tanzania, a third-world country, who live daily with little basic needs. While suffering can result in understandable grumpiness, for others, it purifies their mind and soul. *Therefore, let those suffering in accordance to God's will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator, while continuing to do good* (v. 19). What do you take away from today's reading? How can you apply this to your day?

22. 5.1-5: A Word to Church Leaders

To all Sunday School teachers, small group leaders, the Congregational Council, Friday Fun Fest volunteers, Mobile Food Pantry works, our Sanctuary Choir and Praise team, Adopt-a-Block volunteers, Emerge and Submerge guides, ushers, greeters and counters and all other volunteer group leaders: be examples of the Christian faith (5:3). When we read 1 Peter 2:18-25, I quoted Paul Achtemeier as he explained that the Greek word for example (*hupogrammon*, you will notice the word "grammar" at the end of the word) means to write the alphabet so children can copy it and thereby learn to write. In that same way, we are to learn by being examples how to belong, behave and believe in a church community.

Secondly, we are to lead and serve in humility (5:5). Not one of us are perfect but we follow and trust the Perfect One, Jesus Christ. We are a community of grace that lives and embraces the forgiveness of God. It is our peace and joy to know the love that God has for each one of us as the chosen people of God in Christ. In humility, it is our great honor to love and serve the Lord.

To whom is God using you to be an example of the faith at Grace? What does an attitude of humility look like for you? Express your gratitude for gift of belonging to our Lord and his church in prayer. Pray for Grace and its leaders that we may all grow stronger as a church and in our faith and witness.

God honors our prayers (5:7). As part of the Lord's body the church, we do not need to hold our worries or concerns upon our own shoulders. We are encouraged to put our trust in God and place our anxiety into the Lord's hands. Be aware that in this physical world in which we live there is a spiritual reality at work. In all of the letter of 1 Peter with so much suffering caused by Empire and local adversaries, this is the one and only mention of the destructive activity

of the devil (5:8). Like the thief in John 10:10 who comes to kill, steal and destroy the church, the greater One, Jesus, comes to give abundant life. Resist the activity of the evil one (5:9).

Jesus created the church community from his first followers because he knew we would be stronger in faith, service and witness together than alone. *It all begins with God. God works through people. It's all about relationships.* We have been chosen to be loved by God, called to live, serve and give witness to our faith in this community. The world hungers for what we have received. Many in our community are suspicious of institutions including the church. Critics are watching how we speak about the church to which we belong, how we behave if any different than any other person, and what we say about our Lord in whom we believe. By the power of the Holy Spirit, God can take our less than compelling actions and words and turn them into a life-changing experience as people far from the Lord and his church come to find hope, life and salvation! Offer your prayer to Holy Spirit to use you to his glory.

23 5.6-14: A Closing Reminder

God honors our prayers (5:7). As part of the Lord's body the church, we do not need to hold our worries or concerns upon our own shoulders. We are encouraged to put our trust in God and place our anxiety into the Lord's hands. Be aware that in this physical world in which we live there is a spiritual reality at work. In all of the letter of 1 Peter with so much suffering caused by Empire and local adversaries, this is the one and only mention of the destructive activity of the devil (5:8). Like the thief in John 10:10 who comes to kill, steal and destroy the church, the greater One, Jesus, comes to give abundant life. Resist the activity of the evil one (5:9).

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Map of Asia Minor is from: Mark Allan Powell, *Introducing The New Testament*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009, p. 471.

Many interpretive ideas for *The Call* were a result of research primarily gleaned from: Paul J. Achtemeier, *Hermeneia: 1 Peter*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996.

The information given on 20th century events in Turkey was taken from Wikipedia: *Christianity in Turkey*.

Experience how to

belong

become

believe

