

## **Ephesians 4:11-13**

<sup>11</sup> He himself gave the apostles, as well as the prophets, as well as the evangelists, as well as the pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> for the purpose of training the saints for the work of serving, in order to build up the body of Christ. <sup>13</sup> This is to continue until we all reach unity in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, resulting in a mature man with a stature reaching to the measure of the fullness of Christ.

## **Acts 13:1–5**

<sup>1</sup>Now in the church at Antioch there were some prophets and teachers: Barnabas; Simeon, who was called Niger; Lucius of Cyrene; Manaen, who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch; and Saul. <sup>2</sup> While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” <sup>3</sup> Then, after they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them off. <sup>4</sup> So they were sent out by the Holy Spirit and went down to Seleucia. From there they sailed to Cyprus. <sup>5</sup> When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. They also had John as their assistant.

Sermon for Epiphany 3, January 24, 2021, St. Paul’s Green Garden, MI; Texts: Ephesians 4:11-13; Acts 13:1-5

Theme: The Public Ministry: “Jesus Gave, the Holy Spirit Calls”

“You are Priests to Accomplish God’s Purposes”

1. Jesus instituted the public ministry of the Church
2. The Holy Spirit calls those who serve

In the name of Jesus, Dear fellow redeemed,

In John 3:16 our Lord Jesus tells us that God so loved the world that he GAVE his only Son. This is one of the most precious verses we have in all of scripture because it firmly yet simply states that God loves every sinner and that he gave us what is most precious to him to save us, namely his own son. We cherish this verse. But as we grow in our understanding of God’s Word we come to realize that God gave us much more than his Son. It was not simply salvation that he gave us. When he gave us his son, everything Jesus did was also an assurance for us that he really did pay for every sin of sinner and that we are future, eternal residents of heaven.

And when Jesus came into the world HE also gave—he gave himself, he gave his life. And as he gave he also had the future of his disciples in mind. In scripture we find that Jesus uses the word “Church” only twice in all the gospels, both times in the book of Matthew. Yet as we look back at everything he did he shows that he always had his church of believers in mind. He showed this when he gave Christians the ministry of the keys, the authority and privilege of forgiving the sins of those who repent or of

withholding forgiveness from those who refuse to repent. Every Christian has this right and privilege. At the same time Jesus wants order and calm in his church not chaos and disorder. So once again, for the good of the church, so that the church can spread the gospel in a way that is orderly and shows respect to God, Paul tells us that Jesus gave the public ministry to his church. These are they who serve the whole congregation with the gospel in word and sacraments.

And so that we understand clearly that no one calls himself to the public ministry Paul tells us and the scriptures assure us that the Holy Spirit is the one who calls those who serve in the public ministry of the church. They use the ministry of the keys on behalf of the whole congregations and for the benefit of the whole body of Christ.

Today, in two different passages from scripture we will grow in our understanding of the public use of the ministry of the keys—Jesus instituted the public ministry of the church and the Holy Spirit calls those who serve.

In Ephesians chap. 4 Paul reminds us that when Jesus completed all his work of rescuing us from the punishment of our sins, when he had proved to his believes that he was alive, and that God had accepted his payment for all sins he ascended to heaven. There he took up all his power and glory to rule the universe so that he could both build up and preserve his church on earth. The building ad growing process of the church always involves using the ministry of the keys—the gospel in word and sacraments.

When Jesus gave Christians the keys he also made certain that the keys would be used not just by every Christian privately, but also by those who are called to the public ministry of the Church.

**“He himself gave the apostles, as well as the prophets, as well as the evangelists, as well as the pastors and teachers,<sup>12</sup> for the purpose of training the saints for the work of serving,”** Here Paul mentions a number of different types of workers in the public ministry. He probably does not mention them by rank. Scripture says very little about rank among those who are called to minister in the church. In fact Jesus made it clear to his disciples that they were not to lord it over one another. What he emphasized was that they serve the church with God’s word and the sacraments Jesus gave us.

Most of the different positions of ministry that Paul mentions, such as apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastors and teachers are probably, in some way similar to the pastoral ministry that we know today. All of them used the Word of God to instruct, whether it was the very young believer or instructing those who were now more mature in their faith and understanding so that they could take positions of trust and leadership in the church. All of this is a continuous process.

Paul uses this analogy of the human body here as he does so often: **“He himself gave the apostles, as well as the prophets, as well as the evangelists, as well as the pastors and teachers, for the purpose of training the saints for the work of serving, in order to build up the body of Christ.”** Experience and scientific study shows that every person, no matter what age they are, will benefit from both good nutrition and

some kind of physical activity, even just a very little. Good food and proper exercise not only maintain but even help build up the body. When a congregation uses the ministry of the keys to bring all the straying to repentance, to build up the young and the weak and then uses the Word of God and the sacrament to provide even more spiritual nourishment for those who are maturing in their faith, it is preparing God's people for works of service. When more and more Christians are working and serving in a congregation the body of Christ will grow, because more people will be reached and more people will be touched by the life saving message that Jesus is their Savior. And the Holy Spirit will work in their hearts.

But it is to our shame when we become spiritually lazy and we set aside the ministry of the keys. My sinful nature still hates to use the keys. It is lazy, and as Martin Luther might say, only wants to serve itself. When we do not eat the spiritual food of God's Word ourselves and when we do not encourage others in our congregation to do so, we are starving ourselves and others spiritually. Not only is this so, but we are starving the whole congregation, and the congregation's spiritual health WILL suffer. This is absolutely true—history bears this out. Why do you think Jesus sent the 7 letters to the 7 churches in chapter 2-4 of the book of Revelation? They were spiritually sick. The only way they could get better was by making full use of the ministry of the Keys.

Paul implies that those who are called to the public ministry will use God's Word and sacraments when he says that Jesus gave the public ministry to prepare God's people for the work of serving. This is the way it should be. God's Word builds our faith. When faith grows we exercise our spiritual muscles. The very nature of Christian faith and life is that we will be active in serving our Lord and our fellow Christians when our faith is growing. One of the most important ways we serve each other is to encourage each other in our faith, to call back those who are straying, to help those who are struggling with trials or who are battling Satan and temptation. These are just some of the ways we serve our Lord when we gather together to hear and learn God's Word together in worship and Bible Study. All of these are the benefits of the public ministry that Jesus has given us. But God makes it clear that no one calls himself to the public ministry of the Church. That would make for chaos. Instead scripture shows us that the Holy Spirit who inspired the scriptures to be written is also the one who calls people to the public ministry.

The book of Acts is sometimes called the Acts of the Apostles, but perhaps it should be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit. When a severe persecution broke out in Jerusalem after the stoning of Stephen, believers left Jerusalem and went to other parts of the world. Many of them only told fellow believers about Jesus. But then Luke also reports: **“Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.”** Here these believers were telling others the good news and the Holy Spirit blessed this message. He will bless it when you tell others about Jesus, too.

Now when the mother church in Jerusalem heard that the number of believers in Antioch was increasing they sent Barnabas to learn about the congregation's situation and needs. What he found was that God's grace was with them and he encouraged them. Since there were many Gentiles here and since the Lord had already called Saul, once a persecutor, to be the apostle to the gentiles, Barnabas went to Tarsus, found Saul and brought him back to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul taught and instructed people in Antioch of Syria. We see here that Barnabas and Saul did not simply call themselves to public ministry. This group of young believers probably had little organization. When the church in Jerusalem found out about them, they wanted to provide assistance so they sent Barnabas. But it was Saul who had been called by the Holy Spirit as the apostle to the gentiles. The congregation seems to have then accepted them as workers in the public ministry within their congregation for that year. Then after a year, the Holy Spirit's role in calling people to the public ministry becomes more evident. We read in Acts 13: **"Now in the church at Antioch there were some prophets and teachers: Barnabas; Simeon, who was called Niger; Lucius of Cyrene; Manaen, who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch; and Saul. <sup>2</sup> While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." <sup>3</sup> Then, after they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them off."**

After a year of teaching and preaching by Saul and Barnabas it seems the congregation had added many more people and many Christians had been prepared for works of service. It seems three of them had been called to serve the congregation publicly in addition to Saul and Barnabas. Now there was a strong group of leaders who knew the scriptures and who were equipped to use the word and Sacraments publicly to serve the congregation in Antioch. And we see, where a congregation is using the Ministry of the Keys both privately and publicly the Holy Spirit does not sit on his hands. **"While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." <sup>3</sup> Then, after they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them off."** It is obvious that the Holy Spirit is at work here, bringing people to faith as they are taught, strengthening Christians in their faith and calling more leaders to the public ministry as they are needed. Now the Spirit is ready to move out into other parts of the world. So he specifically and very obviously calls Saul and Barnabas to go out to do more mission work, apparently among the gentiles. The congregation at Antioch recognized that the Holy Spirit had called these two men. So they placed their hands on them to bless them as we do in a commissioning service when we send out missionaries. So Saul and Barnabas were released from their call to serve the church at Antioch to go to the gentiles with the message of salvation.

The Holy Spirit continues to call pastors teachers, missionaries, Sunday School teachers, staff ministers, councilmen, committee chairmen and many others to a

congregation's public ministry. We recognize that when someone is elected by the voters of a congregation and that person accepts the call to serve that the Holy Spirit has moved the congregation to call the individual and the same Spirit has moved the individual to accept the call.

There are those who may think that when a pastor received a call to serve another congregation in another place that it is his choice to accept or decline a call. The Spirit calls, the person called prays for guidance, because now the person has two calls. So then the pastor, teacher or other called worker seeks guidance and direction as to how he should evaluate his ministry and his gifts in carrying out the ministry in both congregations. But when at last he comes to a decision the pastor needs to realize that the Spirit has used the advice and direction of his fellow pastors, members to aid him in coming to a decision. And then he does not need to look back for in the end it is the Holy Spirit who calls a man and the congregation recognizes the man who serves them as pastor has been called by the Spirit through them. When we do this we are accepting the blessings God gives us through the Ministry of the Keys.

What a miracle of God's power and love that he gives us the keys. What a blessing that Jesus instituted the public ministry and sends his Holy Spirit to call us jars of clay to serve his people with his word. What a blessing that he gives his word power even when it is spoken from the mouths of us sinners. May the Spirit bless and empower us to keep using the Ministry of the Keys. And may he make his word effective in people's hearts as we use these keys. Amen.