



Questions about God's calling (continued)

In the July Newsletter I talked about the call I had received to pastor a congregation in Nebraska. By now, most of you also know that I declined the call, and that I have been presented with another opportunity - the opportunity to help plant another LC-MS congregation in the area while continuing to serve Shepherd of the Hills. So, God's calling is something I've had on my heart, mind and prayers almost constantly for the past several months.

The book of Haggai has been a big help in contemplating God's calling, so I'd like to start off with a brief look at that book in this longer than usual "Questions for Pastor" column.

Here's the background to the book of Haggai:

The people of Israel had just come back from a 70-year exile in Babylon. (God had allowed the Babylonians to overtake Israel and cart the survivors off to Babylon as a consequence of their turning away from God). After their 70-year exile, God had now allowed them to come back to resettle the "Promised Land," and to rebuild the Temple, so they would have a place to come before God and worship him. But the people put the Temple on the "back burner" as they built themselves nice, comfortable places to live. Here's where God speaks through the prophet Haggai to *call* the people to repent and make the God's plans their number one priority:

Haggai 1:4_6

"Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house (the Temple) remains a ruin?" Now this is what the Lord Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it."

In other words: "There are consequences for not doing what God calls you to do." In this case the consequence of making "self-satisfaction" their priority was that they were never able to be satisfied.

But when they repented and made the commitment to do what God was calling, they found he made some promises:

Haggai 1:13_14

Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, gave this message of the Lord to the people: "I am with you," declares the Lord. So the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the Lord Almighty, their God,

Haggai 2:19

Until now, the vine and the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive tree have not borne fruit. " 'From this day on I will bless you.' "

To sum up this brief study:

It's easy to get comfortable. It's easy to focus on our needs and wants and ignore what God is calling (which usually is something that forces us out of our comfort zone).

We need to remember that God brings consequences for placing comfort above his calling (vv4-6).

We also need to remember that when we repent and follow God's call, He promises:

- 1) His presence would be with us (v13)
- 2) His power would enable us to carry out his calling (v14)
- 3) To bless us for following what he called them to do. (V19)

"So what do you see God calling you to do?"

Sometimes it's been easy to see God's calling. For example, earlier this spring, I had an interview with a church in St Paul. It was very apparent that congregation had no vision. I had no interest in a situation like that.

Sometimes it's been a little tougher to see God's calling. The call to the congregation in Nebraska, for example. It had a lot of opportunities, but still it was not a close enough fit with my talents and ministry interests.

Sometimes it's been real tough to see God's calling. Like when I received a phone call from the District Office asking if I would considering planting a church in the North-Willmar/Spicer area while continuing to serve Shepherd of the Hills. This area has been on District's "new mission start" list for some time. District talked to both Pastor Bielenberg of Redeemer in Willmar and me about it as early as 3 years ago. Synod provided a recent demographic survey and found (as we all know) the area still growing and still presents the opportunity for a mission church to reach the unchurched.

At first, I was (maybe like many of you when I first mentioned this opportunity) very skeptical. I found myself coming up with all sorts of reasons why I shouldn't consider taking on this challenge (all reasons based on my own human fears).

But over the weeks and months as I kept praying and seeking God's guidance on the issue, it seemed God kept showing me, through just about *every* way possible...

...through answers to prayer

...through things I'd read in my daily Bible reading

...through things Violet and I would be studying in our Bible study time (like the Haggai study above)

...through things I'd find myself telling *other* people in sermons and counseling situations

...through things people and other pastors in the circuit would say...

In all those ways it seemed God kept "hitting me over the head" with this thought:

"It doesn't matter what your fears are, if I call you to do it, you have nothing to fear. I will take care of you and make it happen. Moses, Gideon, Jeremiah, all those guys came up with reasons why they didn't think they could do things I called them to do. It doesn't matter what you think. What matters is what I - God - thinks."

In contemplating the opportunity of planting a new congregation, my biggest concern has always been, that this not have an adverse effect on Shepherd of the Hills - the people and their faith. So, I've looked at this opportunity from all sorts of angles, talked with the circuit pastors, considered lots of questions and comments, studied a church planting manual and God has shown me over and over that being involved in planting a new church should be an extremely positive - not adverse - situation for Shepherd of the Hills. Some of the benefits to our congregation include:

+ The potential for reduced expense - sharing a pastor salary.

(This may be a benefit, but I wouldn't focus much on it. I'd focus on the next benefit)

+ The potential for sharing staff - a Youth Minister, Director of Outreach or Director of Education.

(Two churches should not only be able to share a pastor but another professional staff person as well. This is the future of ministry in rural areas. Churches doing what the schools have done - getting together and sharing resources they could only dream about on their own.)

+ The excitement of being involved in a major outreach effort - in our own backyard - without the worry of needing to move. (The Circuit pastors feel this could be a great *circuit-wide* project)

+ It would necessitate more lay people involvement - which is always a positive thing for a church.

+ Much greater potential for reaching people who have some church affiliation but haven't been active for some time. (Studies have shown people in this category are much more receptive to coming to a new church than coming back to one they haven't been to for a long time.)

+ Enable us to better fill the need for both more traditional and more contemporary worship styles -

(New congregations aimed at the unchurched typically have more success with contemporary worship, and Shepherd could continue along with a more traditional-worship style.

After much prayer seeking God's will and asking him to help me see beyond my will, I have a real sense that this is something God is calling us to be part of. (I wouldn't have brought it up if I didn't have that sense, and I didn't bring it up until after I've spent several months seeking God's will on the idea). I'd simply ask you to do what I've been doing and pray for God to show you His will. Trusting that what he calls us to do, we need not fear, because he promises his presence, his power and blessings for following his call - and promises consequences for staying comfortable and not following his call.

You may have more questions than what I've addressed. I probably don't have the answers. This is still an idea in the early stages. Not a lot of details. One answer I do have is the purpose of this new church:

The purpose is NOT to take people from Redeemer or Shepherd or the Methodist church or other Lutheran churches or *any* other church. We don't want to just be moving people around from one church to another. The purpose is to reach those who don't go to church. If people have a heart for reaching the lost and want to help - great. If they just want to be able to drive fewer miles to worship - that's not the point. This is a mission church to reach those who are not now active in a church. Aside from that answer, I don't have a lot more. Pastor Biegner from District has offered to come and do a question/answer session for us August 7 after the Monday 7:15 Service. I hope you can come.

I gave this glimpse "inside my head" on the issue of planting a new church at the last Voter's Meeting.

I wanted to share it with the rest of you who weren't at that meeting.

Thanks for asking,
Pastor David

Send your questions to pastor@livingwordlutheran.net