

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

January 18, 2026

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 49: 1-7

Responsive Reading: Psalm 40: 1-11

Epistle Reading: 1 Corinthians 1: 1-9

Gospel Reading John 1: 29-42

Sermon: The Calling

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary: We too are called.

“Listen, O coastlands, to ME, and take heed, you peoples from afar! The Lord has called ME from the womb; From the matrix of My mother, He has made mention of My name. And He has made My mouth like a sharp sword; In the shadow of His hand, He has hidden ME. And made Me a polished shaft; In His quiver He has hidden Me.”

If this sounds familiar, it is because it is the start of our Old Testament reading from Isaiah. Isaiah is saying that God called him. In Isaiah 43:1, God says, “Fear not for I have redeemed

you; I have called you by name. You are Mine.” Isaiah is claiming (rightly so) that God has called him by his name.

I know that at this point, I am deviating from what the standard commentaries say as to somehow this was Jesus speaking of Himself in the Old Testament, but rebel that I am, I believe Isaiah was speaking of his own calling.

Our Psalm 40 reading has David relating how God has called him.

I recently was looking at a Bible that I had used when I first went into Lay Preaching. On the first blank page just inside the front cover, I had written, Psalm 40 - Jim’s Psalm. Interested in that statement, I re-read the entire Psalm 40. I realized that this was the time period in my life where I was ashamed of my lifestyle and was asking God to help me turn my life around, and so I had “Waited patiently (sort of) for the Lord.”

Hear again the first three verses and see how I could relate to David’s words.

“I waited patiently for the Lord; And He inclined to ME, and heard MY cry. He also brought ME up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set MY feet upon a rock, and established MY steps. He has put a new song in MY mouth --- Praise to our God; Many will see it and fear, and will trust in the Lord.”

“Fear not (David and Jim), I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; You are Mine.” Isn’t that cool, called by name and redeemed!

If you want to talk about a spectacular call, our Epistle lesson from 1st Corinthians is a letter from the guy who may have had the most spectacular call in history.

Paul had a life-changing event on the road to Damascus, when a light blinded him and Jesus talked to him directly. This Epistle starts, “(I) Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God...”

Here we have Isaiah, David and Paul called by God, but it does not stop there. Verse 2 says, “To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, CALLED TO BE SAINTS, with ALL who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours...”

Hey guys, that is not just the people of the Church at Corinth, that is all of us! We are all called to be saints, i.e. believers in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

Paul is telling the people of the Church of Corinth that they were called and were now answering that call. Paul says, “I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God... that you were enriched in every thing by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was

confirmed in you... you will be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom YOU WERE CALLED into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

One thing though. In order to be called, you must be recognized, and recognized accurately by the caller, i.e. our Lord.

This concept is expressed in our Gospel, where John the Baptist points out Jesus to two of his disciples, and they leave John to follow Jesus. One of these is Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. Andrew in turn takes his brother to see Jesus, and Jesus says, “You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas” (which is translated, A Stone).

As a youth, I always heard this translated “A Rock.” The actual meaning is a stone or a little rock, and gives an entirely different concept than a “big” rock. Jesus later says, “Upon this rock I will build my Kingdom.” The word rock promotes the image of a solid base, like the rock that the wise man built his house on, and the storms could not knock it down. But this is quite different.

My brother confronted me on this issue. Bud described this rock as a pebble. The significance is that if Peter was a “rock” he could hold up this new faith, but if Peter was a “pebble,” it would take the strength of Jesus to steady this new world order upon a tiny little pebble.

Now the significance to this message is that we are not as much like a rock as we are like a pebble. If God can use a “pebble” like Peter, He can use a pebble like John Doe, or any name of any one of us.

If there is anything that the Bible can show us, it is that God can and will use the least remarkable people to do the most remarkable things. Moses was a fugitive with a stutter when the burning bush gave him his marching orders. Joseph was a spoiled kid with a fancy coat and a propensity to infuriate his brothers before he saved them from a famine. David was a sheep herder who kept messing up and even committed adultery, murder and a cover-up, before uniting Israel and establishing it as a world power, and the list goes on and on.

The point is that God can recognize our potential and will call us to do the “good works that He has put before us”. On the back of today’s bulletin is a picture of a phone and the inscription, “God’s calling. Will you answer?”

I guess I could have saved a lot of time if I had just told you to look at that and said Hallelujah and Amen.