

Rev. Mike Cole
Providence Presbyterian Church
Second Sunday in Ordinary Time
January 18, 2026
1 Corinthians 1:1-9; Isaiah 49:1-7

"Children of God"

The Lord called us long ago. Before we were born, before the very clocks of time lurched to a start, God chose us. He plucked us right off the shelf and said, "Yes, you'll do just fine!" While we floated, asleep in our mother's womb, the hand of God hovered over us, ready to tap us on the shoulder to do his work.

The prophet Samuel, answer to his mother's prayers, was named into God's service even before he was born. Countless others throughout history who played both minor and major roles in the kingdom of God seemed somehow destined for their part. Whether it was Paul, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Martin Luther King, or Rosa Parks - each was chosen by God to fulfill a special purpose in God's plan.

I, too, have known a nagging sense that I could not evade, try as I might. Even though I was confirmed as a Presbyterian at age 13, it didn't take me long to fall away from the church. During my teen years, I was very much into pleasing myself - going to parties, trying to be "Mr. Big Shot" on campus. And even though ministry was the furthest thing from my mind, I found myself performing mock marriages on the band bus going to out of town football games. Why would a kid who had no interest in ministry do that? Then came a Baptist revival in Alabama where I felt my soul touched by God in a way that finally made me yield.

Yes, I've known the call of God. And you have, too. Maybe not dramatic; maybe not life changing, but you're here today because of it. You've known the call of God, too. Deep down, you know that's true, even if you try to deny it to yourself or others.

From the womb, God has set our feet on a path, named our vocation, and formed our abilities by hand. Before we were born God called us - to be his. Our creator gave us a role as children of God. Children of God build churches and cathedrals that welcome dozens or thousands to give praise to God.

Children of God blast into outer space. Did you know that Buzz Aldrin, an Elder at Webster Presbyterian Church in Houston, took communion on the Moon on July 20, 1969?

Every year on the Sunday closest to July 20 the church celebrates Lunar Communion using the small chalice and bread plate Buzz used. Children of God do all sorts of things both mundane and amazing. Why not? After all, we serve God Almighty!

But we should know that failure has also dogged the heels of every disciple's step. The truth is that there are times, more than we wish to remember, when we've knocked ourselves out and nothing happened. There are some Sundays when I put everything I've got into a sermon- a creative introduction, grand illustrations, a polished delivery and a spellbinding conclusion - only to be greeted by deafening silence.

Sometimes we all feel like we are toiling in vain. There's not much glory here when we feel like we've spent our strength for nothing. But we press on anyway. We keep going. Children of God know the meaning of "delayed gratification." We doggedly persevere in trust: "Surely our cause is with the Lord." Surely.

Sunday mornings come and go and most of them merge into a kind of liturgical vanilla pudding. Now and then, the clouds part and a sudden beam of sunlight shoots forth: a teenager says, "Can we start a youth group?" - somebody e-mails a thank you note for a meal brought over – a friend tells you that something you said lifted their spirits.

We just never know. One person that we help seems to suck up all the grace we have to give and still asks for more, while another gets their life in order, and moves on to help someone else. We walk by faith, not by sight. Someone once said, "Good teachers must be in love with the task of sowing the seed, not reaping the harvest."

Parents, pastors, Sunday School teachers, Elders, Deacons, health care professionals, social workers, Directors of Music, and Youth Ministry - just about every disciple, must be in love with something more significant than immediate, visible results. Because our goals are so high, the work of God so mysterious, the plans of God for the world so grand, that the harvest doesn't occur until years, decades, maybe even centuries after the sowing.

The first temptation is to settle for lower expectations - whittle down our ideals to those which can be measured. No longer is the purpose of the church the redemption of humanity and the salvation of the world, but rather managing the church's postage budget. The disciple who has never said - at the end of the worship, on the way home from visiting the nursing home, or when dealing with the consequences of their children's misbehavior - "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity," is a disciple with very low expectations.

But just when we're about to throw in the towel, God gives us some unexpected glimpse of grace - the Lord staggers our souls with a grand new vision of our task. God brings Tamil Church to us in their time of need. We work quickly to formalize their use of our building

for worship and other activities. And we learn from them how to be joyful in the Lord despite worldly circumstances.

John the Baptist caught a glimpse of the divine vision when Jesus came to him to be baptized. As soon as he saw Jesus he knew that his star would diminish while Jesus' star intensified. But little did John realize that in sending Andrew to follow after Jesus he would be setting in motion a process whose effects are still being felt today. Andrew enlisted Peter, who became the head of the apostles and argued for the expansion of the church into the non-Jewish world.

As a direct result of Peter's advocacy, Paul made journeys throughout the western world planting church after church. Those churches took the gospel of Christ to everyone from peasants to emperors. Through the centuries, the gospel of Jesus Christ has been taken into every corner of the world, including our own right here in Colorado. All this from one man's glimpse of the divine vision.

And who is to say that same thing won't happen in an encounter we have? Perhaps that child you helped tie their shoe, or the teenager to whom you gave some special time, or the young professional person who came to you for advice, or the person sitting right next to you will have a profound effect on the world. We don't know when what we say or do will impact a life for good.

In fact, when we think about it deeply, our role in the splendid sweep of God's grand design nearly takes our breath away. We're handed a creation-sized portfolio. Our task is not just to straighten out dysfunctional Presbyterians (a mighty task to be sure), but to offer God's peace, God's shalom, to all people - everybody - the whole world. Suddenly the whole pattern begins to fall into place: we realize that we've settled for a small screen view of the world when we could have had I-MAX.

We are children of God called to serve God's enormous purpose: to proclaim salvation to all creation. And when, at last, understanding steals over our souls, we will find our souls filling with the strength of God. And we will dare the impossible. It has been this way from the beginning.

Like a polished arrow, the words, "I have a dream," fly out of one servant's mouth, and iron shackles of racism spring open, massive walls of oppression come tumbling down, and eyes lift to behold the dawn of God's liberation. That's the power of God, at work in the children of God, for the purpose of God.

We have been called, friends - handpicked from the womb. Children of the salvation of God. And God will be our strength. God will be our strength. All because we are children of God.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Charge: Wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are, God will equip you. God will accomplish a purpose in your where you are. Christ who dwells within you has something He wants to do through you where you are. Believe this and go in God's grace, love and power. Amen