

The long-awaited Messiah came to this world, and the first thing he did during his three years of public ministry was to call people. He called up his disciples! The Son of Almighty God gathered people even though he would be able to do all the things alone by himself. What you need to think about is, God created the world only with his word but God sent his only begotten Son to save the world. Since Almighty God is literally omnipotent, it may seem that God must work alone to carry out the work of salvation perfectly, but God calls imperfect humans and works through them. This is what we witness in Mark 1 today. Jesus walked along the Sea of Galilee, calling Simon and Andrew, and calling James and John.

Did He call them because they were well prepared with great specs? No. Not at all! By worldly standards, they were even insignificant. Nevertheless, Jesus called them and walked with them for His holy work. Of course, even at that time, just because Jesus called, not everyone followed him. There is a saying, "God does not call the equipped. God equips the called." Therein lies our hope!

The church is called "Ecclesia" in a Greek word. Ecclesia means "an assembly" or "a group of people called together for a purpose." Paul the Apostle, in 1 Corinthians 1, said, "the church of God...those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours" Before being a physical building or institution, the church is a group of people, that is, a group of believers who confess Jesus as their Savior, Jesus as their Lord of life, and obey His words.

At the end of Jesus' ministry, as he was washing his disciples' feet before being arrested, he said to them, "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, that you love one another."

Some of you may have heard the word koinonia. Since it is a Greek word, koinonia only appears in the New Testament—between 18 and 20 times, depending on the translation used. It translates into words like "community" or "fellowship". This is more than just coffee hour. It means the common life and fellowship of love shared by Christians with Christ and with each other in Christ.

It is very precious that you come to church, worship God, share the joys and worries of life, pray together, get to know each other better, show interest in each other, and pray for each other. Living like this is God's holy calling for you as Ecclesia.

I read a very interesting article. Some of you may know it. The title is "The Good Life: Lessons from the World's Longest Scientific Study of Happiness." Robert Waldinger is the Director of Adult Development Studies at Harvard University and has been tracking the lives of 724 men at the Institute for 75 years. First of all, these studies are extremely rare. Most of these projects end up in less than 10 years. There are too many people who drop off during the study, the funds are low, the researchers lose interest in the research, or the researchers die and no one takes over their work. However, this study still survived.

Two groups have been tracked since 1938, when the first group of studies began when they were second year students at Harvard University. They all graduated from college during World War II, and many of them went to war. The second group they followed were boys born in the poorest part of Boston. When the study began, all of the boys were interviewed, got medical checkups, and researchers visited their homes to interview their parents.

And these boys grew up to be adults of various occupations. They became factory workers, lawyers, bricklayers, doctors, and one of them became president of the United States. Some were successful in their professional life and climbed from the bottom of society to the very top, and some walked the opposite path of life. To summarize the conclusions of the study, what we have learned from the tens of thousands of pages of life data so far from 75 years of research is that close relationships and social connections are crucial for our well-being as we age.

Three great lessons could be deduced about relationships: the first is that social connections are beneficial, and solitude is harmful. Studies have shown that closer social connections with family, friends and communities lead to happier and healthier lives.

The second big lesson is that it does not matter how many friends you have, but the quality of the relationships is paramount. Good and warm relationships

keep you healthy. Those who had the highest satisfaction with their relationship at age 50 were the healthiest at age 80. A good and intimate relationship is a buffer for aging pain.

The third big lesson is that good relationships protect not only your body but also your brains. So don't just let fellowships happen, be proactive!

As I read this study, I felt that there was a very important link between the study and the Gospels. Jesus came to Earth not only for the ministry itself, but to forge a relationship. There is a high calling in coming to church, and loving each other as we see the love of the Lord. There are moments when we feel that it might be easier to live alone, but like God's holy calling, we must move forward hand in hand. People who heed such a call will live a happier and healthier life than those who don't.

And last but not least, John Ernest Bode was an Anglican clergyman serving a small parish near Cambridge, England when his three children, a daughter and two sons, were ready for confirmation. Bode not only presided over their confirmation, but also wrote a hymn especially for the occasion – telling the children that the hymn included “all the important truths I want you to remember.”

The hymn was originally, “O Jesus, We Have Promised” – in view of the fact that more than one child was involved in the confirmation. Changed to “O Jesus, I Have Promised,” it serves as a fitting hymn of commitment for every Christian. It not only reminds us of the promises that we have made to Jesus, but it also asks Jesus to protect us from the dangers and temptations posed by the world – and it reminds us that Jesus has made promises too – that Jesus promised that we will live with him in glory.

Dear beloved sisters and brothers in Christ, Jesus called us to ecclesia. I am the church. You are the church. We are the church together. We live by sharing koinonia as we continue to learn to love one another in the Lord. Please remember that you are not alone. Brothers and sisters in faith will walk by your side. And most importantly, our Lord will always be with you until the end of time. Fairfield Grace, may God's grace, peace, goodness, and mercy be with you, your family, your business, your studies, and with the lives of your children. To Christ be thanks and praise. Amen.