We are halfway in our Lenten journey towards Easter. In the past three weeks, we have been learning about how and why God gives us a calling through the series of messages “Called.”

We have been studying the calling stories of different Bible characters. For example, from Abraham’s calling, we learned that God called him to be a blessing to all the families of the earth. From Moses’ calling, we learned that he was called as a response to the prayers of people asking God for deliverance from the suffering and oppression of the Egyptians. And from Esther, we learned that we could also assume our calling when we become aware of a need or an injustice and step into it to make it right. So, from all of these, we know that God’s calling is to be a blessing, an answer to people’s prayers, and to do the right thing.

Today’s message is about how God’s love moves us to accept our calling too. For this, we are going to look into the apostle Paul’s incredible story of transformation and service. Here is his story as recorded in the Book of Acts 9:1-22,

“Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” He asked, “Who are you, Lord?” The reply came, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. For three days he was without sight and neither ate nor drank.

Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” He answered, “Here I am, Lord.” The Lord said to him, “Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.” But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem, and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.” But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.” All who heard him were amazed and said, “Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem among those who invoked this name? And has he not come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?” Saul became increasingly more powerful and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Messiah.”

This is the story of Paul’s conversion. But who was he? Paul, formerly known as Saul, was an enemy of the early Christian church. He was a zealous Pharisee who persecuted the followers of Jesus to have them arrested or even killed (see Stephen, Acts 7), believing they were a threat to the Jewish faith. He believed that Jesus was a false prophet, so he determined to do everything in his power to stop the spread of Christianity.

But one day, as he was on his way to arrest and imprison Christians, he encountered the risen Christ, and everything changed as his life was transformed forever. As he was traveling, a bright light suddenly appeared, and he fell to the ground. He heard a voice say, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” Saul responded, “Who are you, Lord?” and the voice replied, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.” This encounter left Saul confused and blinded, and for three days fasted and prayed.

During this time, Ananias, a disciple of Jesus, was directed by God to go and pray for healing for him. After Paul was healed, he became a new man as God’s love transformed him. He became a devoted follower of Christ and began to preach the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles, becoming one of the most influential figures in the early church, writing many letters (13-14) that form a significant part of the New Testament.

Paul’s life is a powerful testimony to the transformative power of God’s love and how it can move us to accept God’s calling and serve him with devotion. After being an enemy of Jesus, God’s love gave him understanding and he was changed. Then, through the power of God’s love, Paul was filled with a passion for spreading the gospel to the world. He dedicated his life to serving God, traveling far and wide to preach the good news of salvation. He endured countless hardships, including imprisonment, beatings, and shipwrecks, but he never wavered in his faith.

What changed Paul from an enemy of Jesus to a faithful servant? In 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, he writes, “For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all… so that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for the one who for their sake died and was raised.” What changed Paul was the power of love. As an enemy of Jesus, he was transformed when he experienced his grace. He was a foe no more but a friend. The love of Christ was the driving force behind Paul’s life and his calling to serve. His transformation is a powerful testimony to the love and grace of God, but it also teaches us how our love and gratitude to God move us to say, “Here is my life; use me as you may please. I am yours.”

These are the exact words I said to Jesus when I had my transformative encounter with him too. I was raised in the church since I was a child and knew “everything church,” but I had yet to understand God’s love. So, one night, while conversing about the meaning of Jesus’s sacrifice, I realized how much God loved me to do that. I felt a warmth in my chest as I experienced this incredible gratitude. As I realized how much I was loved, I said to Jesus, “I am yours.” From that moment on, my life changed completely. And I have been on that journey of love and gratitude from that day forward. Like Queen Esther, I did not supernaturally hear the voice of God calling me to serve. But as Paul, my calling was a response to God’s love.

But serving God is not always inspired by love. The truth is, serving God can sometimes feel like a chore or a duty that we have to fulfill. Other times, our motivations to serve might be getting praise, recognition, status, power, or any of those things the world tells us we need to find fulfillment.

For this, consider what Paul said in Galatians 5:13-14, “For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become enslaved to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Paul is echoing Jesus’ commandment to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Paul understood from personal experience that when we serve God out of love, it is an expression of our love for God and the people around us. It is not about fulfilling a duty or obligation or gaining power and praise but about showing love in action because we are grateful.

My friends, God’s love is a force that can transform our hearts and minds and change our lives forever. As with Paul, we blossom when we are loved. Our self-worth is built and there is joy in our service. I know this well because it happened to me. When we experience God’s love, it touches our hearts and moves us to respond, “Here I am, send me.” I knew of God for years, but it was not enough to simply acknowledge God intellectually. I needed to let God’s love come into my heart and change how I lived my life.

What if this is what we also need? What if we need to embrace God with all our feelings and not just rely on what we intellectually know of him? At the end of the day, our lives thrive and are shaped by the people who love us—including God.

Let me encourage you today to serve God out of love and gratitude, even if you think you do not know enough or worse, that you know everything.

Here is the invitation and good news: Let us respond to God’s call with open hearts and willing spirits, trusting in his goodness and faithfulness. Whether it is through volunteering at church in a ministry, serving your family and friends, or reaching out to those in need, let your service be an expression of your love for God because as we serve others in love, we become vessels of God’s grace and mercy, spreading his light to those around us.

And as we surrender ourselves to God’s love, let us be certain that God’s plan and purpose for us are fulfilled. Only when we surrender our lives to God and seek to serve him out of love do we step into God’s unique plan and purpose for us.